

When the Water Ran Red

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When the Water Ran Red

by [Poker](#)

Summary

On a foolish bet, Tommy, Tubbo, Ranboo, and Purpled took a boat out to the haunted Mako Island. Shrouded in rumor and grisly ghost stories, Mako Island has been a scene of mystery for years.

They come back forever changed. And soon they realize there are some people who are very interested in those changes. People who live deep below the churning waves of the bay. People who would like to make sure they never leave the ocean again.

Notes

It's still May here so Mermaid still counts.

Tagging the wonderful JadeSpeedster17, they have a wonderful H2O AU of their own! I won't be using their prompt for this fic but they did inspire me to write my own take with this AU. Check their stuff out!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

- Inspired by [Sleepy Bois Prompts and AUs](#) by [JadeSpeedster17](#)

Metamorphosis

If there was one thing Tubbo loathed, it was that inevitable moment when a teacher looked at them and said ‘well why don’t you stand up at the front and introduce yourselves’.

Because first of all, being stared at by a bunch of teenagers was not how he wanted to start his day. And second of all, telling people about himself? Terrible. Next they would say he had to be honest about their cheesy ice breaker suggestions or something.

“I’m Tubbo. Yes, it’s short for something. No, It’s not Toby. It’s Tubbo.” Tubbo rattled off, rapid fire. He had this exact greeting down to a science, designed to confuse the teacher so they would let him sit down as fast as possible and share as little as possible.

“M Tommy. Biggest man alive.” Tommy said, half slumping on Tubbo’s shoulder. Tubbo rolled his eyes but didn’t shake him off. Tommy hated the first day of school even more than he did and that was saying something. They had seen a lot of first days at school before.

Though not quite like this. Half of the class was still damp. Sand crusted the floor and he was pretty sure some kids were still wearing their swimsuits. They were also sitting in one of those weird seat orders that teachers insisted brought teamwork and community, with desks arranged in little groups of four.

In Tubbo’s experience, that meant he could angle to get four desks all to him and Tommy. No one wanted to sit with the odd new kids after all.

Apparently there were perks to being moved into a foster home on a tiny island. Tubbo let himself feel smug that he had called it and bullied Tommy into watching teen beach dramas with him. It was all in the name of research after all! In Brighton, it was still cold and damp and wintry.

Everyone stayed quiet for a long minute. Tommy huffed even more, beginning to fidget with his shirt sleeve. Tubbo snuck a glance at the teacher who was staring at their desk, lost in thought. Or possibly asleep. They were quite old after all, their hair long turned to silver and their voice as raspy as the grave.

Tubbo was halfway through plotting the best route to sneak to a desk and gaslight everyone into thinking that was his and Tommy’s desks now when the teacher finally moved. “You may be seated.” The teacher said slowly, blinking murky eyes at the two.

Tommy popped back to his feet, earning a hiss and a seat from Tubbo as the motion nearly knocked him over. He grabbed Tubbo’s arm, earning another eye roll as he started dragging the other to an unattended pair of seats.

In fact, the entire desk group was almost empty. Score! There was just one kid sitting there, the only one who hadn’t been watching their introduction. It was easy enough to pick them out, they wore a violet hoodie in a room filled with summer wear. They slouched further down, purple eyes meeting his before flickering away.

“Yeah. I have a question.” Tubbo’s head snapped up, scanning the classroom. The speaker was slouching at a desk across the classroom from their aim. It was easy enough to pick them out, all the other desk groups were just a little bit further away from theirs. Like sharks in a group of minnows.

Tubbo’s eyes narrowed when he saw them smirk, the knowing head nods to the other table members. The other person had planned this for the maximum awkwardness factor. He’d be almost impressed if he wasn’t vibrating with the desire to bite them.

He did not like being a target for bullies. And he liked Tommy being a target even less.

“So, where are you from?” The teenager drawled. “Not every day we get new kids and just your name? Teach asked you to tell us about yourself.”

“Not around here.” Tubbo answered, his grip white knuckled on Tommy’s sleeve. He gave them a warning tug when the other began to push forward. They couldn’t start their first day in detention.

“And?” Tubbo snuck a glance back at the teacher but they were staring at their desk again. No interruption from that side. He gritted his teeth.

“We lived in Brighton before this.” Tommy said, shoving his hands into his pockets. “That enough for you?”

“Why did you move down here then? Your parents decided to change jobs to some tiny island?” Smug Teen said. Teen dramas were right, there was always a bully character in island schools. He was even blond. “No interesting story?”

Tubbo quickly searched for his words, trying to spin together a story before Tommy lost his temper with the prodding. Because with the prodding would turn up the why they moved here and the why was because the only home willing to take them both was on this island. The why would turn up homes in the double digits in just a decade.

And then prodding would turn into actual bullying. He had seen enough of it back in the United Kingdom, back when they had been stupid and trusting enough to assume being the foster kids would be fine. But it wasn’t. And this wasn’t the first time people had asked them ‘innocent’ questions.

Somebody would be finding a lit firecracker in their locker later.

“Well, you see-“ Tubbo said, forcing the charming smile that somehow convinced adults that he was the responsible one of the duo.

A loud clattering before him.

The door didn’t so much open as it burst open, the doorknob bouncing off the opposite wall with a sharp crack that almost guaranteed a new dent in the plaster. Similarly, the teen walking in didn’t really walk so much as they fell through.

Literally.

They laid on the ground for a minute, panting hard. Tubbo knew a distraction when he saw one. Taking advantage of the lack of eyes, he tightened his grip on Tommy, quickly towing the other to their seats. When the bully kid looked at them again, they were sitting at their desks, the questioning over.

Tommy stuck his tongue out at them. They glared.

“Late again, Mr. Ranboo?” The teacher said, shifting in their desk with an odd popping noise. The teen scrambled to their feet and- wow. They were fucking tall. Super tall. Like, what was these parents feeding their kid tall. That should be illegal tall.

“You gotta be kidding me.” Tommy whispered, staring at them. Tubbo glanced between him and the- Ranboo, running some quick mental calculations.

“I think you’re shorter than them, big man.” He whispered back. That was rare to find, Tommy was tall for his age. This must be what vindication felt like. Tommy’s glare doubled.

“Sorry, my alarm clock didn’t go off and I had to run here.” Ranboo said, shrinking into himself. Tubbo tilted his head to the side. They had a strange fondness for black and white which he saw right away.

Their hair had been dyed half black and half white down the middle. The theme continued with a half black and half white mask. He was kind of disappointed that their sunglasses, completely black, and clothes didn’t fit the bill. Even if their clothes looked more like a suit than summer clothes.

Even he had traded his sweater for a green shirt. Ranboo must be roasting in that.

“Again?” There was that same smug voice as before. Tubbo rolled his eyes as Ranboo shrunk a little bit more into himself.

“Leave off him.” Tommy snapped. He leaned over his seat, glaring at the other guy. The sniggering at that table stopped.

“Oh, you messed up now.” The teen in a purple hoodie mumbled. True enough if Tubbo wasn’t pretty sure they already had a target on their back anyways.

This school was small, even smaller than their already tiny school back in Brighton. There was only one class of nearly twenty for their entire grade and one school for the entire island. He wouldn’t be surprised if they were the first new kids in years.

Same principles still apply. If Tommy didn’t scare them off first, then Tubbo would be pulling out the firecrackers. Detention or no detention.

“Take your seat.” The teacher droned. “And open your history books to page-“

Tubbo’s eyes went a bit wide in surprise and Ranboo scrambled over to the table, slipping into the last empty seat across from Tubbo. Pity. He started fumbling in his bag, pulling out a worn textbook.

A textbook that neither Tommy nor Tubbo had.

Tommy immediately slumped down in his chair to hide from the teacher as Tubbo stared at the desk, debating if it would be worth bringing up now or after class. On one hand, they'd be a bit behind on the other hand, was it worth feeding more fodder to the bullies? It's not like the book was ever helpful to him.

"Pst." Who the fuck actually made that noise in real life? Tubbo looked up, across the desk. Ranboo carefully nudged his book until it spread across both desks, easily visible.

Tubbo hid a smile, looks like this school wouldn't be too bad after all.

Even if the sound of the teacher's droning made him feel like he was going to fall asleep. The history lesson seemed to drag on and on. Tommy had started aggressively braiding Tubbo's hair by the time the bell finally rang.

"Thanks for that." Tubbo said, stretching and feeling that delightful crack of his joints popping. "That was nice of you."

"No problem, it was the least I could do. You got in trouble for me after all." Ranboo said, ducking his head. "Not, uh, not like it was hard to share my book. I barely understand what the teacher is saying most of the time. You know?"

"Fuck yeah, I do." Tommy said, leaning over the table. "Is that how he teaches all the fucking time?"

"Back up." Tubbo said, nudging Tommy in the side. "What do you mean we got in trouble? I don't think the teacher noticed anything. Honestly, I think we could have gotten into a fight and they still wouldn't have noticed."

"Oh, yeah, uh, the teacher is cool. They don't notice much." Ranboo said, shrinking down again. For someone so tall, he could get so small in his chair. "But Clay, uh, he can be a bit of a jerk-"

"Aw, is ickle Ranboo talking about us?" Ranboo was practically sliding under the desk when a hand slammed down on the back of his chair. Bully kid- Clay loomed over him, his back up crew lurking behind.

It was so cheesy that Tubbo actually rolled his eyes. He had seen worse.

"Kind of impressed you got up the backbone to do more than sit there and cry." Clay continued. "Feeling really gutsy today, aren't you?"

"I told you to back off of him." Tommy said, starting to rise out of his seat. Tubbo put a hand out to stop him and then thought better of it. Nothing could stop Tommy when he had his hackles up. Now, it was damage control time.

"Oh, looks like the new kid is feeling brave." Clay said, snickering. "Think you're a real big man, don't you?"

“Bigger man than you are.” Tommy said, puffing his chest out. Tubbo rested his hands on the table, going straight for the most unsettling smile he knew. One of the bullies twitched and his smile widened even further.

“I hope you're not thinking of hitting him.” Tubbo chirped, seeing Clay twitch forward. “After all, then we'd all get in trouble. Let me guess, you usually pick on one or two and then lie when they report you? But there's four of us here.”

“Leave me out of this.” Purple hoodie kid hissed, still face down on the table. Tubbo's smile didn't even twitch.

But Clay sure did. He hesitated, glancing back at the other bullies who were looking uncertain now too. “You cowards?” He said, but the threat had lost a little bite now.

But that didn't stop Tommy. “You're more of a coward than us.” He snapped. “You have little bitch energy. I'm way braver than you.”

Tubbo huffed in frustration, but couldn't stop the little smile tugging at his mouth. That was Tommy. Never could stop rubbing salt in the wound, even when it was handled. Like now.

Clay chortled. “You think you're brave?” He said. He roughly shoved Ranboo's shoulder earning a soft ‘hey man’ in response. Tubbo patted the spot he had shoved, earning an uncertain smile. Possibly because he was still using his ‘found nuke instructions’ smile. “If you're like this guy, you're a big scaredy cat.”

“We're braver than all of you.” Tommy shot back. “Who's the fucker picking on others here? Not us, that's fucking who.”

“Brave enough to go to Mako Island?”

That pulled Tommy up short. Tubbo frowned, brow creasing. What was Mako Island?

One of the other bullies laughed. “I bet this joker thinks he can go to the Moon Pool.” He jabbed. “Even if he'd turn tail running before he ever got there.”

“Tommy-“ Ranboo hissed. What little of his face could be seen was pale and he was swatting at Tommy's hands to try and stop him. Even purple hoodie kid was looking at them now. Tubbo winced, reaching forward even though he knew what was coming was inevitable.

“I bet you I can.” Tommy said. Ranboo made a choked sound like a balloon slowly wheezing it's last breath. “In fact, I bet we can all get there.”

Clay's eyes gleamed with satisfaction. “Then it's settled. Bring us a picture of the Moon Pool tomorrow at school and we'll leave you alone. We'll even leave scaredy cat Ranboo alone. But if you turn tail or lie, we're going to make your lives a literal hell until you leave the island.”

“Deal.”

“And I'm talking in the water.” Clay called back. “I better see you swimming!”

“So, how much did Tommy screw up?” Tubbo asked idly, watching the bullies leave the room. The room had cleared, everyone else either fleeing the confrontation or heading to the lunch room. Or both. He ignored Tommy’s splutters of indignation, leaning his elbows on the table. “And how screwed are we?”

“So screwed.” Ranboo moaned, slipping down further in his chair. That could not be good for his spine. “There’s a reason nobody goes to Mako Island.”

“Sharks?” Tommy said, looking way too excited. Though admittedly, Tubbo had been psyched at the possibility of seeing sharks. “Lasers? Secret labs?”

“Worse.” Ranboo moaned. “Ghosts.”

He looked up, seeing the confused stares of Tommy and Tubbo. “Oh, right. Forgot you didn’t grow up here. Pretty much everyone who’s here for more than a week knows about the story of Mako island.”

“Well, then.” Tubbo said. “Spill the deets. We can’t exactly plan if we don’t know what’s going on.”

“I don’t know how true this is, I heard it from one of the kids on my street a few years ago. Everybody knows about it but no one really likes to talk, you know?” Ranboo said, taking a deep breath. “Mako Island is a smaller island a few miles offshore. It was actually where the original colony of settlers lived before they moved here. And they moved in a pretty big hurry.”

“No one’s actually quite sure when it started, but slowly, boats stopped coming back from expeditions. Wood, fabric from the sails, rope from the rigging, all kinds of stuff would all wash up on the shore. No bodies ever washed up but some people swore the water in the bay would turn red after a ship left. So, people stopped leaving at all. They had farms and animals, they didn’t need to leave and no one really cared they were stuck. But then, people in the colonies started turning up dead. Drowned usually. Always on the full moon. It started with one, here and there, but soon entire groups started getting picked off. No connections, no traces of who did it. And many of them were strong adults, it would have been hard. People should have noticed. No matter what they did, they couldn’t find who was doing it.”

“So, one night on the full moon, they packed everyone they could into the remaining ships and set off. People figured it was better to try and flee rather than stay and get picked off. They made it and well, Mako Island has been abandoned ever since. Couple times people tried to snatch it up and do something with it. Billionaire tried to put a vacation home on it once. But no one has ever stayed so they just declared it as a state park and closed it to visitors.”

“And the Moon Pool?” Tubbo prompted, sharing a look with Tommy. Now this sounded like some proper scary stories.

“Oh.” Ranboo blinked. “That’s where the bodies were always found. It’s a pool of water found in a cavern under the inactive island volcano. People say it’s haunted now and swimming will curse you. Or something. No one can really agree on how it’ll curse you.”

“And nobody found who the murderous fucker was?” Tommy asked. He had a dreamy look in eyes that spelled trouble.

“No, like I said, there was never any connection between the victims and nobody saw them disappear. Even when they tried to stay inside and hide, whoever it was knew exactly who was vulnerable.” Ranboo said, fiddling with his tie and he glanced at the door. “People have all kinds of theories from normal stuff like a serial killer to fluke illnesses. Some theorists think there’s murderous mermaids, or sirens I guess, who patrol the waters of the bay and kill all who cross their territory.”

“I heard that they never found any signs of struggle either.” Tubbo blinked in surprise when it wasn’t Ranboo who continued. Purple hoodie kid didn’t look at them when he talked. “It was like the people just walked into the pool and drowned.”

“Freaky.” Tommy said. “How do we get there?”

Ranboo spluttered. “Did you not just hear what I said? Mystery deaths! Terror! Completely unsolved and terrifying!”

“We’ve done worse.” Tubbo said. He shrugged at Ranboo’s look of incomprehension. “One time we broke into a graveyard to look for ghosts. Didn’t find anything. And while mysteries sound scary, I think I believe in the horror of bullies more.”

Ranboo buried his head in his hands. “Well, you can’t go anyways.” He said. “My family doesn’t have a boat and I don’t think anyone would lend you a boat short notice to go to Mako Island.”

“Shit, Ranboob is right.” Tommy said, slumping against the table and ignoring Ranboo’s offended noises. “And I guess stealing one is a bad idea!”

Tommy had been mortally offended most of the week that their foster family, nice as they were, were one of the few families who didn’t have a boat. Figures that Tommy would be right that they would need one.

“Yes?!” Ranboo said.

“What about you?” Tubbo said, turning to the kid in the purple hoodie. They cracked one eye open, looking back at him. “Do you have a boat we could use?”

“I do but the answer is no.” They said before closing their eye again. Tommy spluttered, slamming his hands against the table.

“Why not? Our lives depend on it! Your life depends on it! Why won’t you lend us your boat?” He yelled. The other didn’t even twitch.

“He’s right, Clay included you in his threat. Wouldn’t you prefer visiting a haunted island and not getting bullied?” Tubbo ventured. The kid didn’t even answer. This would be a tough one to crack. “Consider this-“

Ranboo sighed and put twenty dollars on the table. The kid swept it away before Tommy could grab it. “Purpled, take us to the island and you can have this and then another twenty dollars to bring us back.”

“Fifty.”

“Fine.” Tubbo cut in. Ranboo sighed but didn’t argue. Good man.

“Meet me at the south dock an hour before midnight.” Purpled said, tucking his money into his pocket. “If you’re late, I will leave you.”

“This is gonna be fucking amazing.” Tommy said, beaming. Ranboo groaned. “I hope we’ll see some ghosts!”

If there was one good thing, Tubbo reflected, none of them got seasick. That would have made the already long journey even longer.

Tommy had tried, he really did. But even his gift for gab and Tubbo’s need to ramble had started to lose out against the mood. Neither of the other two had talked much either. Ranboo had curled into a ball in the center of the boat and Purpled kept his eyes on the ocean ahead of them.

The little boat was quick enough for being a worn fishing boat, at least by Tubbo’s limited perspective. It was a nice boat really. It was big enough to hold all of them and have a little space left over to fit the motor and a canopy overhead. White paint against fading red had proclaimed it to be ‘Dogchamp’, a name that Tommy had quickly fallen in love with.

“Brighter than I thought though.” Tubbo said, looking up. The full moon looks huge tonight and the sky is studded with glimmering stars. “Like something out of a picture.”

They didn’t even need a light to sail by. The full moon was enough.

“How much longer?” Ranboo moaned, curling up into a tighter ball. He was still dressed in his suit, even with Tommy and Tubbo wearing swimsuits and shirts. Even Purpled was wearing swim trunks under his hoodie.

Though the hoodie was looking like a better and better idea. It was way colder on the ocean than he had expected. Tommy and him had been crammed together in one seat, pressing together to keep warm.

“We’re nearly there.” Purples said, dodging the statement. He pointed ahead. A dark silhouette loomed against the night sky. They drew closer, the boat drifting from side to side to dodge rocks that suddenly appeared out from the water. “No one else visits at night, so we should be cleared to dock as close as possible.”

As he was saying this, he turned the boat a bit to the side, following the gentle arc of the island as it curved inward. When Tubbo had looked up pictures early, the island had looked

like the fin of a shark from above. Kind of ironic, when it was actually named for the mako sharks that lurked offshore to hunt fish.

Ahead, the gentle curve suddenly shot inwards, making a notch. Like something had taken a chunk out of the shark fin. That was their goal.

Tubbo looked over the island, humming a bit in awe. It was definitely kind of creepy and he could see why no one had decided to stay here- Wait a moment.

“No one is supposed to be here?” He confirmed.

“No.” Ranboo mumbled, barely audible over the roar of the waves. “Even the coast guard doesn’t patrol over here at night. It’s freaky, man.”

“Then why is there another boat?” Tubbo said, pointing. It was hard to see and he had nearly mistaken it for one of the rocks. It had been tucked into the shore further up the coast, the only part nearly visible over the rocks and waves being the mast for the sail.

Purpled swore, killing the boat engine. “I recognize the fucking boat. It’s tried to scare me out of the water a couple times.” He said with a huff. “That’s Jeremy’s boat, he’s one of Clay’s friends and a massive asshole.”

Tubbo tilted his head to the side. If he had been just a bit more distracted, there was no way he could have noticed it, even with the light of the full moon. It had been hidden where the shadows of the island were darkest and unless someone was looking at it right, it was practically invisible.

Tommy got to it first. “This is a fucking ambush.” He said. “That’s why they agreed to it.”

Oh, that was wicked. Clumsy but wicked. If it worked, Clay and the bullies got to torment them here and for the rest of the year. If it didn’t, Clay still got the fun of scaring them. Tubbo leaned back in his seat, steepling his fingers. “But it’s one we need to spring.”

“Can’t we just land somewhere else?” Ranboo said, peeking out of his spot. “And just take a longer hike?”

“A longer hike through the jungle.” Purpled countered. “I didn’t sign up for that and I really doubt they’re right by the bay. They’ll catch us further up where the trail narrows.”

“Tommy, get the paint.” Tubbo said. Ranboo yelped as Tommy nearly flung himself out of his cramped seat, fumbling around in his pockets and pulling out half crushed tubes of paint, flinging them into the bottom of the boat.

“Fucking yes!”

“Do you just carry those around wherever you go?” Ranboo said, staring at the pile as it slowly grew bigger.

“I know, he’s so weird.” Tubbo said lovingly. Ranboo began to nod. “Everyone knows that firecrackers are the more practical option to carry.”

Ranboo stopped nodding. "What are you going to do with those then?" He asked. "I think throwing paint at them will just make them madder."

"Oh, we're not throwing paint at them." Tubbo said wickedly. "If they want to visit a haunted island, we'll give them a haunted island."

"I think they wimped out man." Jeremy said, staring balefully at the bay below as he flicked his cigarette to the ground and crushed it. "I haven't seen anything going by."

"They better not." Clay snapped, folding his arms. He would be in massive trouble if his family found out he had sailed out here at night. That trouble better be sweetened by chasing those punk kids off the island as they screamed in terror.

"I'm with Jeremy. Maybe we should head back. I need to study for the test tomorrow anyway." Brad said. Fucking Brad. He always agreed with anything Jeremy said. They all knew the test tomorrow was a joke, the teacher never noticed people swapping papers or sharing answers.

"Yeah, we're running out of booze too." Andy said, glaring into the nearly empty cooler that Alex had tossed in the back of the boat. "Should've brought more. I'm ready to go back."

"Five more minutes." Clay said. He hadn't gotten to be the leader without seeing when these assholes would mutiny.

And it was kind of freaky. With only five of them here, counting him, it was near silent. Even the animals in the jungles had shut up. But freaky in a cool way.

Maybe he should throw a party here sometime soon. Call it a Moon Party, bring the beer, and see who was brave enough to join. Get a bonfire going and he doubted any island murderer would be stupid enough to come over. If they weren't already in the grave already. They could even hold it in that broken down shell of a house that that billionaire had started building before he sold it off in a drunken fit.

He scoffed, taking another sip of his drink and letting the burning fill him with rage. He was going to destroy them for this. He had dug his ass out of his comfortable bed and dragged his friends out here to hear some screams.

A scream cut through the night.

That wasn't their doing. Clay lowered his drink with a frown, looking up. It sounded like it came from further down the trail. Nobody else should be on this island, they had done a drive by to see if those assholes were on land yet and saw nothing. Nobody could have swam around them.

The scream spluttered out but now he could hear the crackling and snapping of branches like someone was sprinting through them with no regard for pain. He stepped a bit further out, craning his head to see down the narrow path that broke through the thick jungle.

The brown haired kid came running out like his ass was on fire, eyes so wide he could practically see the whites from here. The smug one who had sat there and smiled like some creepy puppet from a horror movie.

Well, he wasn't smiling. Clay started down the path, ignoring how his friends started to protest. He was going to kick that kid's ass-

"Run! He got Tommy!" He screamed. And that's when Clay saw the jungle behind him was still moving. One moment that kid was half running half staggering up the trail. The next there was a dreadful crunch and the kid fell.

And didn't move again.

A shadowy shape stumbled behind him, lurching out through the trees. Clay's bottle fell to the ground.

They looked... drowned. Like those grisly pictures the news ran sometimes of people who got unlucky out on the water and became another shipwreck. Their face was bluish green, water still dribbling from one corner of their mouth, plastering their dark hair to their head. Their body was twisting grotesquely, one arm limp but the other arm raised from when they- when they got that kid. Wet rags and seaweed draped thread body, glistening in the moonlight.

Their eyes were as dark as pits.

Water bubbles out of their mouth as they groan, a deep hollow sound like the wind screaming through the sea caves. Brad screamed, turning tail and sprinting after Jeremy who was hauling ass through the jungle like a baby.

"Don't run!" Clay roared, interrupting Andy and Alex who were beginning to scramble away. He cracked his knuckles, stepping forward. "It's probably some jokester trying to prank us."

"You fucking deal with it then!" Andy yelled, grabbing Alex's arm and towing them into the jungle. Fucking twins. When they ran away, they always did it together. Fine, he could deal with this asshole himself. And then he'd deal with those stupid students who thought they could mess with him.

Clay stepped forward, raising one hand. "I don't know which one you fucking are, but you are dead." He snarled. The person tilted their head as he stepped forward, watching him with dead eyes before looking back to the fallen student.

And with a horrifying popping noise, they reached down and started wrenching the kid's arm out of their socket. Clay felt his stomach lurch as the kid's arm twisted and twisted-

With a groan of his own, his stomach threatening to revolt, he turned and fled down the trail. His face so chalky white his friends screamed again when they saw him stumbling towards them.

The jungle was silent. The creature paused what they were doing, looking up. “Let go of my fucking arm.” Tubbo said, still face down. With a soft gasp, the creature gently dropped his arm, scrambling back.

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” They said. They reached up, wiping away the water from their mouth. After a moment, they slipped a black and white mask out of their pocket and put it back on with a wince.

“Nah, it’s fine. That’s gymnastics for you.” Tubbo said, popping to his feet. “Great addition, I think that really sold it. Are they gone?”

“Almost.” Tommy said, emerging from a little further down the path. “They scrambled back on their boat but I can’t see them well enough to tell if they’re leaving. Ain’t my fault.”

“They probably will.” Ranboo said, fixing his sunglasses. “You did a really good job painting me.”

“Glad you recognized my skills. I’m a fucking ace painter.” Tommy said proudly. “Dunno why you had all those fucking horror movie noises on your phone though.”

“They calm me.” Ranboo said with a shrug.

“God, you’re so fucking weird.” Tommy said, almost admiringly. It was so good to see his friends getting along, Tubbo thought as he massaged his aching shoulder. “I like it. Keep it up.”

“Thanks?” Ranboo said. “I guess?”

“Not to break from this conversation.” Tubbo said, raising his voice. “But Purpled, did they leave?”

“Yeah.” Purpled said, sauntering up the trail with his hands tucked into his hoodie pocket. “They nearly got the courage to turn around but then whatever Tommy added to their boat made it jolt and slip away from shore and they panicked and gunned it.”

“I didn’t do that!” Tommy defended, looking at their questioning looks. “I just painted some insults on the part that was on the shore. I didn’t set any explosives or anything. That’s Tubbo’s thing.”

“He’s right there. Was probably just a wave.” Tubbo said, shrugging. “Let’s head to the Moon Pool before they catch on and turn around.”

“Follow me.” Ranboo said, heading up the trail. Tubbo obediently trailed after him, swatting Tommy when it looked like the other was about to mutiny and demand he led. Normally, he’d be fine with Tommy leading them on an adventure but right now, he wanted to get to the Moon Pool without getting lost.

The trail led them further up the mountain, the volcano actually. It was weird to think what they were walking on used to be covered in magma and ash. Eventually, the undergrowth cleared until they were walking along the top of the ridge, the bay painted before them.

“I can see why they settled here. What an amazing view.” Tommy said, flinging his arms up. “I feel like I’m on top of the world!”

“Pretty sure it was for the good land but sure.” Purpled said. “Look alive, the cave entrance is just ahead.”

Tubbo looked up. Sure enough, further up the ridge, black painted one area. As they grew closer, he could see jagged stalactites hanging from the ceiling. Like a mouth threatening to swallow them, he thought with a shiver.

Creepy.

If he thought the jungle was quiet, it was nothing compared to the silence of the cave that swallowed them. Their voices rang off the walls before being swallowed by the earth.

“Just a bit further.” Ranboo said but his tone said it was more for his benefit than theirs. Tubbo slipped a hand on his shoulder, getting a thankful look from the other. “If I remember the story right, this tunnel will take us straight to the Moon Pool.”

“It better. It’s fucking freezing in here.” Tommy said, rubbing his arms. “I thought islands were supposed to be warm.”

“Sun can’t reach down here.” Tubbo said, looking around the smooth tunnel as they walked. It was odd how... flat the walls were. The only stalactites were the ones at the mouth of the cave. But the tunnel itself looked almost carved out. The floor was covered in sand. It was barely wide enough for them to walk through two by two.

“Used to be warmer though. This was probably a lava tube.” Purpled said. He shrugged when everyone turned to look at him. “I like reading about volcanoes sometimes. They’re interesting.”

“The cavern was probably left after the lava cooled then.” Tubbo said, quickening his steps. “Kinda neat. You get a pool of anti lava where the lava was.”

“You mean water?” Ranboo said uncertainly as he started walking.

“Anti lava.” Tubbo repeated. He swept his arms forward “See?”

The tunnel opened up into a sprawling cavern, the ceiling stretching up, up, up until it opened up to the starry sky at the very top. The moon peeked over the rim, perfectly illuminating the cavern below with silver light.

In front of them, the rock floor slopes down for ten feet before hitting the pool. And what a pool! The water was so perfectly clear he could see all the way to the bottom, rivaling any swimming pool he had seen before.

Tommy whooped, pushing his way past. “Last one in’s a rotten egg!” He yelled. He didn’t even bother to remove his shirt before sprinting into the water, only briefly stopping to toss his phone on the beach.

Tubbo laughed, starting to jog down to the water. “Are you coming in?” He yelled back at the other two. “It has to be all of us after all.”

“You don’t pay me enough for this.” Purpled said, folding his arms. Ranboo lingered beside him.

“But it’s corpse water.” He said mournfully, staring at the pool. “I don’t want to be swimming in water where dead bodies have been.”

“Don’t be a pussy!”

“The water cycles though.” Tubbo said, pointing at the very back of the cavern. The clear water let them see the dark tunnel at the very deepest part of the pool. “Probably stretches all the way to the ocean I bet. That’s how the water came in here. If it didn’t cycle, it would be all murky and gross.”

“Come on.” Tommy moaned, stumbling back out of the water. Tubbo yelped as his waving arms dribbled water onto him. “Let’s get this picture!”

“I’d rather deal with Clay then get my clothes wet.” Purpled said, stepping back.

Wrong move. Tommy could smell fear. Tommy pounced, sprinting back up the rock floor with terrifying agility and grabbing Purpled’s hoodie. With a maniacal laugh, he dragged Purpled down to the water, throwing him in. It was only Purpled’s quick reflexes that stopped their own phone from getting soaked.

Purple surfaced, spluttering. “I’m going to fucking kill you!” He yelled, lunging. Tubbo watched fondly as the two tried to drown each other in the clear water before turning back.

“You going to go in? Tommy will throw you in too if you don’t go while he’s distracted.” Tubbo said. Ranboo shook his head.

“I don’t want to.” He said. “All the deaths, they happened under the full moon. What if that happens to us?”

“That was centuries ago.” Tubbo said, stepping forward. “And whoever went serial killer on that village probably went with them. I would have. Why do you really not want to go in?”

Ranboo froze. “You, uh, you noticed, didn’t you?” He said, slumping a bit.

“You’re afraid of water, aren’t you.” Tubbo said. Not a question. He knew. You didn’t get the name scaredy cat or coward from bullies unless they had a weakness they knew was a sore point. Ranboo had been so jittery on the boat. At first he thought it was sea sickness but Ranboo had flinched away when he got too close to the edge as they disembarked. And finally, how he had jumped when Tommy had splashed him with water to finish the drowned look.

“I- yeah.” Ranboo said, rubbing one arm. “I’ve had bad experiences with it and it makes me nervous. I’m fine with like drinking and baths and stuff but anything deeper than a kiddie

pool and I'm out. It feels like something is always waiting to get me and I dunno why. Kind of stupid being an island kid and being scared of water, I know."

"I don't think it's stupid at all. Tons of scary stuff lives in the ocean. So here's the thing, we'll go in together." Tubbo promised. It was kind of like seeing a sad puppy. You just wanted to help them. "You can hold onto me the entire time, Tommy can get the picture, and then you can get out. We'll even wash the paint off."

He saw Ranboo's hesitance waver and pounced with his finishing move. "What's worse, doing a bit of wading or having Clay and his group making your life hell?"

"I dunno." Ranboo said. He hesitated, seeing Tubbo's outstretched arm. "I- fine. But not too deep."

"Not too deep." Tubbo promised. He'll work on the water thing. He already had several schemes for it. Ranboo would never see it coming.

Slowly, Ranboo grabbed his arm and they slowly stumbled backwards down the beach. Tubbo guided him to the spot where Tommy and Purpled's phones had fallen, gently putting his down before Ranboo slowly followed. The water was icy cold but kind of nice. Tubbo inched his way backwards until they were nearly chest deep.

And then the wave hit.

Tubbo spluttered, tightening his grip to keep Ranboo from bolting. The wave had plastered him and Ranboo with water, and Tommy wheezed with laughter.

"What took you so fucking long?" He said, bouncing the water. A sodden Purpled stood next to him, gazing up. Tubbo followed his gaze, looking up.

"Oh, the moon is about to cross over." He said with surprise. From this angle, all of them right below the opening, he could see how the ceiling created a perfect frame for the moon. There was only the tiniest sliver of darkness left.

And then, it was gone. And they were surrounded with light.

Tubbo laughed, watching the mist curl off the water, illuminated by the light of the moon until the clear water turned beautifully silver. Even Purpled cracked a smile. It was almost like the water began to rain upwards or maybe the stars were falling, drifting onto them below.

He felt a rush of bubbles in his stomach, staring up at the beautiful, perfect moon. They all stayed silent, no one wanting to break that perfect moment. It felt so right to stand here. To stand with them. It was like he could almost feel their agreement, that he knew them even though he had only met Purpled and Ranboo this morning.

It felt like the whole world was waiting for something. Holding its breath.

And then the moment broke.

The shadow appeared again, cutting into the side of the moon. The water faded back to clear, the mist disappearing without the moonlight illuminating it.

Tubbo felt like he had sprinted a marathon. He stretched his legs out, wincing at the soreness. Probably cramps from hiking.

“That was-“ Tommy began.

“Let’s just get the picture and go back.” Purpled said, slightly slumped. He moved slowly through the water, back to the beach. Tubbo and Tommy exchanged looks before Tubbo shrugged.

“I’m kinda tired too.” He said. Even Tommy’s boundless energy was dragging. The cold water must have made them feel the exhaustion from hiking hit all at once.

Tommy scowled but nodded. “Maybe we can come back.” He said, glancing up again. The moment was gone but Tubbo could still feel the edge of it in his mind.

“I think we will.” Tubbo said. Neither Ranboo nor Purpled argued.

They went through the motions of taking the photo and dragging themselves out of the water and back down the path. In the end, Tubbo used Tommy’s water bottle back at the boat to wash off the paint. It didn’t feel right to wash the paint off in the pool.

Tubbo slumped heavily back in his seat, watching the waves begin to churn as Purpled gunned the boat again. The ocean was lovely but it lacked the strange clarity of the water in the pool.

The water lingered in the back of his thoughts still. He reached down, scratching at his still damp ankle. It felt strangely itchy for some reason.

Behind them, in the still waters of the bay, something moved. A fin, not of a shark or dolphins but something wholly strange, cut through the water after the boat before suddenly sinking back through the surface.

Overhead, the moon watched the children make their way through the ocean.

Their lives changed forever.

Pool Party

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings: Mild bullying because of Clay (name calling)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo never thought he wouldn't have an appetite.

He prodded warily at the school lunch in front of him. Clem offered to make them lunch but it felt weird to take advantage of it. It felt kind of like a trap. And while he knew it wasn't, it doesn't stop the nerves tingling up his spine.

It wasn't a bad lunch either! The square pizza, some kind of attempt at a salad that looked like it drowned itself in ranch and tater tots. Tubbo swallowed hard. He had been starving all throughout class and now he couldn't eat?

There was a scraping sound and Tubbo glanced up, frowning as he saw that Tommy has shoved the tray away for him. The food was untouched, other than the pizza which only had one bite taken out of it. "You okay?" Tubbo said. Tommy loved school pizza even more than he did. It wasn't like him to suddenly refuse to eat it.

"Fine." Tommy said with a grumble, burying his head in his arms. Tubbo glanced around, thankful the classroom they had staked out to eat in was still empty. Gently, he reached out, checking Tommy's forehead. It wasn't warm, in fact, it was kind of cold.

"I don't think you're sick." He mumbled to himself. But it would have fit. He had been starving most of the day and waking up this morning felt like he was dragging himself through mud. Even now, he was fighting the urge to bury himself in his arms and take a nice long nap.

Good thing he got five cups of coffee in before Tommy managed to pry the coffee pot out of his hands. His love, his life, he could have built a portable burner and had coffee for lunch. It was a sad consolation for the lack of good tea here.

"Stop with your weird coffee pot obsession."

"We were tragically ripped apart, sick boy." Tubbo said, nudging his own lunch tray. The salad shook, a mini avalanche of ranch cascading down the side. Delightful.

"I don't get sick. Sickness is for losers." Tommy said with a huff. "I never once gotten sick in my life and every noted incident was an attempt by my enemies to discredit me."

“Am I your enemy then? Because I distinctly remember the time you got chickenpox-“ Tubbo ducked Tommy’s clumsy swat. “Hey! Watch it!”

“I’m sorry, am I interrupting something?”

Tubbo glanced up, looking at the doorway. “Oh, hey Ranboo!” He said. The other teen awkwardly peeked through the cracked open door, looking at them.

“Yes, you are interrupting something.” Tommy said, glaring. Ranboo twitched but Tubbo clamped a hand over Tommy’s mouth.

“Ignore him, he’s grumpy.” He said. Tubbo rolled his eyes as he felt something wet against his hand. “Look, that’s never going to work on me, I’ve seen worse. Summer of last year for one.”

“What was summer of last year-“ Ranboo started hesitantly.

“We don’t talk about the summer of last year.” Tommy and Tubbo said in unison. Tubbo made a throat cutting motion. As far as he was concerned, May had lasted unusually long last year.

“Oh.” Ranboo said, fidgeting. Tubbo kind of fit bad, he and Tommy had cleared out of the classroom quick, desperate to get some food. Ranboo wasn’t quite a friend, or maybe he was? What were the rules around going to haunted pools on a murder island together?

Did this make them married? That would make taxes far easier.

“No.” Tommy said. He glared at Ranboo when the other twitched again. “Not you, Big T has his scheming face on.”

“You like my scheming face!”

“I want foood.” Tommy grumbled, flipping his head down again. “I don’t want schemes, I want food. Or schemes that get me food.”

They could have had coffee but noooooooo. Coffee had ‘no nutrition’ and ‘was terrible for you’ and ‘stop drinking that, you’re vibrating’. The tea on this island was terrible.

“I can, uh, help with that?” Ranboo said. He waved a hand awkwardly. “I was actually going to ask if you could go out to lunch with me. Or, if you want to go.”

“Can’t, big man. We used our cash on school lunch.” Tubbo said with a shrug. It had made sense at the time. The pizza had smelled appetizing, but once they had gotten their plates, it took a steep downturn. Clem was still at work and there was no way he was going to bug her for money yet.

“Oh, I’ll pay. It’s my treat.” Ranboo assured. Tubbo squinted at him suspiciously.

“And what do you get out of this?” He said, putting one hand out to stop Tommy from bolting over and scamming Ranboo out of food. He liked scamming, but he liked not getting

in trouble more.

Ranboo was a cool kind of weird but Tubbo hadn't gotten this far without being wary.

"He's rich and lonely." Came a dry voice from behind Ranboo. Ranboo jumped, turning around and glaring at the person behind him.

"And what do you get out of this?" Tommy said, mocking Tubbo. Tubbo rolled his eyes at him, smirking at Tommy's mock offense. "Purpled, if that is your real name."

"I told him he owed me because you guys got me sick." Purpled said, leaning to the side so he could be seen through the doorway. "Now come on, I want good food."

"You also got sick?" Tubbo said with a frown. Tommy scoffed.

"Weak."

Purpled looked at Tommy like he wasn't sure if he was going to throw him out the window or throw himself out the window.

Tubbo looked at Tommy and shrugged. His call. He didn't see anything suspicious about the offer. And honestly, it might be good to accept it. Tommy met his eyes, before nodding.

"Let's head out then and get some real food." He said, tossing his. Tray in the classroom trash. Tubbo followed suit, grinning at the other two. "It better be good."

They followed the gravel path down from the school until it met with a sidewalk. One of those weird cheesy things people did for aesthetics, Tubbo guessed, because it was ugly but didn't look that old. He was pretty sure people didn't use blue gravel back when they were making paths around the island especially to go to the school house on a tiny little hill.

It was barely a five minute walk from there. "I can see why the lunchroom was so empty now." Tubbo mumbled to Tommy. He had been kinda surprised, people were all over pizza day in Brighton. It was practically the most popular school event.

"I fucking would too. Those pizzas were nasty." Tommy said with a huff. Clearly not over it yet.

Purpled took the lead, taking them past the bigger boardwalk restaurants. "Most people prefer to eat at the boardwalk instead of at the school cafeteria. Or it's not like most houses are far from here." He pointed out, ducking past a tourist stand. "I know one of the best spots, almost no tourists."

"Okay then." Tubbo said. He shrugged at Tommy. It's not like there had been many tourists in Brighton.

"Yeah, I usually pick up food or go home. My parents work for most of the day but they usually leave food or money on the counter." Ranboo said with a shrug. "Not a huge deal. But usually the lunch room food was better than... that."

From the same loathing in his voice, he had also thought about eating the pizza. Tubbo frowned. That was weird. “Do you like pizza?” He asked.

“What kind of fucking question is that? Of course he likes it.” Tommy said, ducking under someone’s surfboard.

“I guess?” Ranboo said. “I mean, yeah, usually I do but I don’t eat it a lot. My parents prefer me to eat healthy.”

“That’s sad.” Tommy said, shrugging. He then made a face. “But I guess your poor sheltered life must have worked out, you didn’t have to eat that pizza.”

Distantly, Tubbo heard Purpled remark on the pizza but he was thinking hard. That was weird. Both Tommy and Ranboo both said they liked pizza but refused to eat it. And if the sick comment Purpled made was true, he was also feeling weird.

Did they get some kind of bug or virus from the pool? That seemed kind of unluckily but it was the only thing he could think of.

Actually, more likely it was a bug going around class. He didn’t know why his mind jumped to the pool but somehow, it always felt like it was in his thoughts. Tubbo bumped into someone, backing up and smiling at Ranboo.

“We’re here.” Purpled announced. The shop itself looked kind of scarily unkempt like it was about to collapse into the water below. A driftwood sign proclaimed it to be the Barnacle Bay. Charming.

Tommy was less deft. “This looks like a horror show.” He said, frowning. Purpled glared at him.

“Then leave. I’m eating here.” He snapped, pushing his way inside. Tubbo shrugged.

“I’ve seen worse.” He said, pushing his way past Ranboo and Tommy and going inside. It honestly wasn’t that bad on the inside, it was clean, neat, and had interesting stuff on the walls.

Pictures stretching back years, mostly of people holding increasingly ridiculously large fish. Tommy stopped by a shark jaw, poking at the sharp teeth. There weren’t any tables, just a bar area.

And it smelled... absolutely fantastic. Like several levels above the pizza fantastic. He could already feel the drool in his mouth because wow, that smelled amazing. Tubbo followed Purpled to the bar.

“Four specials.” Purpled told the cook who nodded and disappeared into the back. Ranboo shuffled into the chair on the end, allowing Gommy to claim the chair next to Tubbo. Wise man. Tubbo had seen Tommy bite people for taking his seat.

“So, why here?” Ranboo said. He flinched under Purpled’s stare. “I have never been here before and you never talked about it.”

“We didn’t talk at all before you dragged me out to that island and got me sick.” Purpled pointed out. Tubbo raised an eyebrow.

“You sit at the same table and you never talked once?” He said. That seemed impossible to him. Tommy could fill a whole room with noise, but even he had interacted with his previous seat partners. If only to try and scare them off so they got the desks to themselves.

“Not really?” Ranboo said with a shrug. “I was kind of too nervous to talk to anyone and Clay and his friends usually cornered me on my time off.”

“I didn’t really care. I wouldn’t be in that school if it wasn’t for the stupid truancy laws.” Purpled said with a sigh. “And yes, I posted this place because it’s good and I know their catch is actually fresh and well cooked. Most of the tourist restaurants overcharge for terrible fish.”

“And how do you know that?” Tommy challenged. Purpled leveled him with a stare. “Maybe they buy it frozen.”

“Because I fucking caught it.” He said. “Now shut up and eat your food.”

Tubbo opened his mouth to ask more but before he could, a plate was put in front of him. He stared at it, eyes going wide, unhearing of anything else. It looked... amazing.

A whole fish, descaled and still steaming. There might have been some kind of vegetable on the side but as soon as the fish was set down, his brain zeroed in on it like a laser. It took the opportunity to remind him that he had nothing to eat all day but coffee and if he didn’t eat this right now, his stomach was going to riot.

Tubbo took a deep breath before lunging.

Some dim part of his brain told him the cook disappeared, that it was safe to eat, he was alone except for the others who were safe-

He came back halfway through working his way through the fish. Someone shook his shoulder again and Tubbo blinked blearily over to them.

Ranboo stared back, looking kind of shell shocked even through the barrier of sunglasses. His mask was back on but his other hand was still smeared with fish remnants. “I uh,” he glanced down at Tubbo’s plate. Tubbo glanced down, eyes going a bit wide.

The fish was absolutely shredded. Did he rip the entire thing apart with his bare hands? “I guess I was hungry then I thought?” Tubbo said but the tone was hesitant and confused. The veggies were completely untouched but he felt so much better.

“I guess we all were.” Ranboo said, gesturing. Purpled and Tommy were tearing into their fish like they were possessed, stripping meat off the bones with terrifying efficiency. Tommy didn’t even like eating whole fish, they had it once when some rich foster family took them to a fancy dinner to show them off and Tommy refused to eat dinner because it was staring at him. He should have been pushing it away and refusing to eat.

Looking at him, you would never be able to tell.

Tubbo glanced at Ranboo's plate, finding it just as much a mess as the rest of them. "I already finished." Ranboo said, reaching for a napkin to wipe his hands off. "I kind of came to after I finished my fish. I've been trying to get your attention for a bit but you didn't notice till you were almost done."

"Huh." Tubbo said, staring at his hands. He took another bite, easing an eyebrow at Ranboo's surprise. "What? It's good food."

It was good. The fish tasted decadent on his tongue, absolutely perfect. He had never tasted fish so good before. Ranboo shrugged, sitting back in his chair.

There was something weird about this but Tubbo didn't see the need to question it too much. He didn't think anything terrible came from eating fish super fast for some reason. They were probably just hungry and tired from last night.

It took a bit longer for Tommy and Purpled to calm. Tommy came out of it first, dropping the bones with a curse and pushing away from the table. Tubbo passed him a napkin, carefully wiping down the rest of the bar. No sense in leaving a mess behind.

Purpled was quieter, slowly setting the fish down before reaching for his napkin. The look on his face said he most definitely did not want to talk about it.

Tubbo refused to look at their plates, knowing everyone was still feeling a little awkward. "We still have a bit of time before we need to go to class, want to take a walk?" He said.

Ranboo nodded jerkily, setting some cash on the counter. "That should cover it. Let's get going."

Tubbo quickly herded Tommy out. "That wasn't ducking normal." Tommy hissed as they walked out.

"We're probably just hungry and tired." Tubbo pointed out. "I've seen you after we had to pull a road trip before."

Quick moves meant they often got shuffled around for a few hours before getting food again. That weird scene had nothing on the time Tommy and Tubbo went most of the day without food before their social worker got them McDonalds at 2 am before placing them at their next house.

"I guess." Tommy said with a frown. He headed for the end of the boardwalk, dropping down to sit. He glanced up at Purpled. "I guess you were right."

Oo, an admittance of someone being right. Tommy really was sick.

"Of course I was." Purpled said, stiffly. But the way he scowled at the ocean told a different story. He settled against the edge of the boardwalk too, Ranboo and Tubbo following suit.

Tubbo washed the waves roll by, just a few feet under their feet. It was a lovely day for swimming, way too hot to be in the classroom, he thought longingly. Why couldn't they just hop in right now?

"What do we have next period?" Tommy said, staring down at the waves. "Because I don't know about you but if he starts talking about history again, I'm gonna just fucking leave. We didn't even get halfway through the science lesson before he derailed the entire thing."

"The teacher is super into history." Ranboo said, scrunching up so his feet weren't dangling over the wdge. "I can give you my notes, I've kind of heard all of his stories over the years. They're interesting, the first time at least."

"They're pointless." Purpled said, rolling his eyes. "We don't even get tested on most of it. I don't remember the last time we actually had a lesson that didn't touch on history."

Tubbo opened his mouth, turning to ask Purpled a question. Honestly, he's not even quite sure what his question was because it chokes in his throat as he reaches forward. "Purpled, watch--"

Before he can finish, someone shoved Purpled off the pier. There's a brief moment where Purpled's eyes go wide but he doesn't react in time before he's shoved off, slamming into the water with a crash. Bubbles float back up to the surface and Tubbo scrambles to the edge, watching them drift up.

How long is too long? Half a minute? More?

"Whoops." Clay said, sniggering to himself. "Looks like fish boy went to join the fishes."

"What the fuck is wrong with you." Tommy yelled, jumping to his feet. "You ere supposed to leave us the fuck alone! I sent the fucking picture and everything."

Clay scowled. "You know why." He said. Tubbo couldn't help himself. He snickered. Clays gaze snapped to him.

"Something funny, you little freak?" One of his goons said. Then he reached out, about to shove Tommy.

"Do that and I'll scream." Tubbo said, friendly smile instantly dropping. "There's tourists all up and down the boardwalk, you think they won't care? I'll scream like the goat that haunts your nightmares and whispers the sins you've done."

"What the fuck." Nameless Goon #2 said with feeling. He might have said his name, Tubbo didn't care.

"You can run from consequences forever. One day, there'll be no witnesses." Clay said. Tubbo took a deep breath and Tommy looked torn between going for someone's throat or covering his own ears. "Freak."

"Fuck you, fucking unpog wrongun." Tommy snapped. "I'm about to take a sledgehammer to everything you love."

“You don’t even have a sledgehammer.” Clay yelled. He threw up his hands, flipping them off before storming away. Tommy grabbed his hand and Tubbo furrowed his brow, looking at him. Was Tommy so stressed he needed to hold hands-

Oh. No. Tommy just wanted to do a threefold flip off so he could outclass Clay.

Tubbo shrugged, reclaiming his hand. “You really got to stop letting him push you around like that.” Ranboo stared at the ocean below, frozen.

“Yeah, Ranboo, stop being a fucking scaredy cat.” Tommy said, rolling his shoulders back and glaring after Clay. “One bite and I guarantee they’ll leave you alone-“

Ranboo mumbled something. Tubbo leaned down. “What did you say?” Tubbo said, following his gaze. Nothing.

“Purpled hasn’t come up yet.” He whispered. Tubbo thought about the words for a long moment before they hit him.

“Oh shit-“ Tubbo threw out an arm, narrowly catching Tommy before the other bellyflopped into the water.

“What if he’s fucking drowning?”

“I don’t think your drowning flailing is going to help!” Tubbo hissed. Tommy could run like hell but he had the endurance of a chipmunk on caffeine. Once the caffeine ran out, it was just a sad little lump of exhaustion. “I got this.”

“But I can-“

“No-“

“Greatest swimmer alive-“

“Will one of you just jump in there before I throw you in myself.” Ranboo hissed, his eyes wild. “Purpled’s drowning and you’re arguing.”

“I’m not.”

“Either Purpled’s back from the dead, literally, or that’s him.” Tommy said.

Tubbo sat down, looking under the pier. It took him a moment to see him. Purpled popped up for a moment, staying low in the water. He was practically clinging to one of the support logs, hiding in the shadow of it.

“What the fuck are you doing there?” Tommy said. He dodged Tubbo’s affectionate head bump that warned him he was getting too close to being on Tubbo’s level of height and thereby inviting retribution for being out of the way of head bumps every other time. Fucker. “Get out of the water and help us defend your honor.”

"I can't." Purpled hissed. He sank lower in the water when Tubbo tried to crane his head and look at him. Did he get hurt when he fell in? "Don't look."

"Now I'm gonna look. I can't not be nosy." Tubbo said. He leaned over further, keeping his hands tight on the wood to stop from overbalance. Purpled twisted, trying to hide behind the log, a flash of purple from his hoodie-

WAit. That wasn't a hoodie.

"Big man. Dude. Guy I just met. Purple guy." Tubbo said, staring. "Are you a mermaid."

"A mermaid? Tubs, did you get coffee when I wasn't looking?" Tubbo reached up, yanking on Tommy's pants leg, trying to take his legs out from under him.

"No, I see it too." Ranboo whispered. "That was a tail unless the man just pulled the master of quick changes."

Tubbo vibrated with pure glee. He knew mermaids existed! "Why didn't you tell us?" He whisper yelled, tossing a nervous glance at the wandering tourists and locals further down the pier. "We're murder island buddies."

Holy cow this was awesome! They could do so much with this! Purpled was actually a real mermaid! The teen dramas didn't lie to him!

The more analytical part of his mind was more concerned with planning, how to get Purpled out unseen, keeping the government out of this (there were always nefarious bad guys in the tv shows), but right now? His little kid could have this.

MERMAIDS. Tubbo beamed, his fingers tapping little patterns on the wood.

"Why now?" Tommy said. "I just defended your honor, you could've been there instead of putting your tail on or whatever."

"First off all, we're not friends, I'm being bribed to hang out with you." Purpled said. "Secondly, I'm not a mermaid."

"Uh." Tubbo said, raising an eyebrow. Poor lie, he gave it a solid 2 out of 10. "I literally saw the tail. We all saw the tail. We can still see the tail."

In little glimpses as Purpled kept himself afloat. A flash of scales here, a ripple of a fin through the surface. Hiding behind the support log out Purpled's at kind of an odd position from this angle, not able to go low enough to hide his tail fully without plunging into the water.

It was very obviously a tail.

Purpled made an aggravated noise. "Look, I'm not a mermaid." He said. He cut off Tommy's sarcastic reply. "I'm not! But then when I hit the water, I felt all tingly and this happened!"

“That doesn’t seem right.” Ranboo mumbled. He put up his hands defensively at they stared. “I mean, none of the people down the beach are mermaids and I’m pretty sure no one else has had transformation scenes from a magical girl anime when they jump in here. News travel fast okay?”

That was true enough, Tubbo thought, glancing down the beach. There were plenty of people out on the water today and he was pretty sure there would be a lot more screaming if people suddenly became mermaids.

Which brought up the question. Why Purpled and why now?

“Weirdchamp.” Tommy said. He nudged Tubbo. “I guess we can be the big men and rescue you here if you swear eternal loyalty to us.”

“Perish.”

“You sure you’re not secretly a mermaid?” Tubbo asked.

“Your mom didn’t have an affair with a fish right?” Tommy said, tilting his head to the side. “You know what they say, there’s always another fish in the sea. I mean if there was a fish that look like the queen, I’d consider it.”

“Shut up. I’m going to deal with this myself.” Purpled said. “I’m not going to sit here and listen to you mock me.”

“Wait.” Ranboo said, kind of flailing ineffectually. Did he try to grab Purpled and only just remember the other was in the water a few feet away? “We can help! We have a plan!”

“We do?” Tubbo said. He glanced at Tommy. When were they included in this we?

“I kind of thought one of you was going to jump up with a plan if I said that. Poor timing I guess. That’s on me.” Ranboo said, dropping his hands. “But no, we will help.”

“Well.” Tubbo said, glancing down. “I do have a plan. But we’re going to need Dogchamp.”

“You touch my boat, you’re a dead man.” Purpled said.

So, they touched the boat. And got out with a minimal amount of maiming! One scratch when Tommy touched the engine without permission. Apparently Purpled had claws now and wasn’t that weird?

“How is getting further away from the island going to help?” Purpled said, lurking by the boat. It had been so slow getting him close to Dogchamp. The marina was busy at this time of day and it was luck and Purpled that meant Dogchamp was in a more secluded spot.

“A. The less people, the better.” Tubbo said, cheerily. Tommy yanked on the rope, finally untying it. Ranboo was by the engine, the only one Purpled trusted to run it. “B. If you really aren’t a mermaid and this isn’t a poor attempt at a cover up that you are, we need to figure

out how to reverse this. That brings us back to point A, no people. I can't have government coming in till season two and we get our season one power ups."

"This is not going to end well." Purpled said. Tubbo pretended he didn't hear that.

"Ranboo, take your jacket off." The other boy jumped, looking up at him. "Look, I'm not going to burn it. We need something to cover him when he's in the boat in case someone looks."

"No one looking at us." Tommy reported. "There is a rogue seagull though, could be an evil element."

"Can we back up and explain the plan for those who aren't up to date?" Ranboo said but he was pulling off his jacket.

Oh he kind of forgot they wouldn't know. Tommy was so good at picking up his little signals that he forgot Purpled or Ranboo wouldn't. Even if it felt strangely like he'd known them forever.

He didn't trust them because no, that should be impossible. He and Tommy both knew the code even if Tommy still gave away his heart so easily. Trust was hard won. He'd known them for two days. He didn't.

(Why did he feel like he did?)

"Here's my proposal. When Tommy sees a good window, me and him are going to pull Purpled into the boat. Ranboo, you toss the jacket over him as soon as we do, then gun the engine. We'll find a quiet spot and see what we can do." Tubbo said, leaning over the side of the boat. "Ready?"

"Cool- Cool- Cool, so that means we have a plan." Ranboo said, holding his jacket.

Purpled gazed at him, not taking the bait. "That's a stupid plan."

"I reckon unless you got something better which I bet you don't." Tommy said. "Don't want you getting mistaken as a tuna or something. Big L."

"I can't believe I'm doing this." Purpled said, grabbing Tubbo's wrist. With a start, Tubbo realized the scales and frills continued up Purpled's arm. He grimaced at the cold seawater that dampened his sleeve, glancing at Tommy.

"Ready?" Tommy said, keeping an eye on the marine."

"Hope this works out well for your sake." Tubbo mumbled.

"Wait-"

"Now!"

With a heave, Tommy and him yanked Purpled into the boat. Tommy swore as the jacket hit him in the face. Tubbo laughed as the boat jerked forward, sending him tumbling into Purpled.

Tommy yanked him back up on the bench. "We fucking did it!" He yelled, throwing his arms up. "Out in the clear! No one saw a thing!"

"It was a terrible plan." Purpled said, folding his arms. "I'm going to need to get paid for this."

"I was under the impression you aren't a mermaid." Tubbo pointed out. "Did you have some sort of plan? Can you even swim with that right now?"

Purpled went red- actually no. The flush that spread across his face was violet. And the more Tubbo looked, the more differences he could see.

The mermaids in the shows usually just had a simple tail, maybe a flashy fin or two. But Purpled looked well and truly alien. The only similarities he had was that his lower half had merged into a scaly tail.

A brilliant violet, the tail twitched as he looked. It was actually the same color as Purpled's hoodie. Scales ran up Purpled's sides, likely continuing along his back. They curved around his neck, even smaller scales dotting his cheeks like freckles before disappearing.

The top of his arms were nearly completely covered with scales, his fingers now tipped with claws the same color as a bruise.

The same bruised color tinted his sides now and Tubbo watched with shock and fascination as slits in Purpled's sides opened and closed with his breathing. Gills. And judging by the bruising on the areas of Purpled's neck not covered by scales, he's was pretty sure there was a secondary set there. Even his ears were sharper, kind of jagged, more like fins then ears.

Most notable of all were the frills, elaborate ones that ran up the side of his tail and likely along his back judging by the hisses as Purpled tried to get comfortable. They were streaked with lighter purple tints and flashy gold and reminded him of a betta fish.

All of his clothes had vanished, luckily enough because Tubbo was pretty certain his hoodie would have been ruined by now.

"Stop staring at me." Purpled's snapped, glaring at him. Tubbo jerked back.

"Sorry, big man. Not every day you see this." He said. But he couldn't deny it now. Unless Purpled was the greatest disguise artist in the world, he was a mermaid."

"Just, don't." Purpled's grumbled. He looked around. "This should be a good enough place to drop anchor. It's a poor fishing spot and there's no reefs for tourists."

"Bombs away!" Tommy said, tossing the anchor into the water. He rubbed his hands together. "Now what? We pull out the big needles and start our wicked experiments?"

“I dunno, maybe we should wait? It- it might be a timer.” Ranboo said, turning off the motor completely. “It would be easier if we knew what caused it.”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Tommy said. Everyone stared at him. “Listen. Here’s the thing. We all went into a haunted pool together. That’s prime magic material.”

“Oh, I reckon you’re right?” Tubbo said, rubbing his chin. “That’s the most likely answer.”

He could still picture the way the moon had made the pool glow. Did that have something to do with this? Or was he just grasping for useless conjectures? “Maybe it’s radioactive?” That would explain the glowing.”

“I did not get paid enough to swim in a radioactive pool.” Purpled said and Tubbo stumbled as the tail flickered irritably.

“Wait, wait, wait.” Ranboo said, looking at the three of them. “Does that mean we could transform too?”

“I-“ Tubbo paused, staring at the ocean. Part of him wanted to say no. He was just a foster kid from Brighton, he didn’t turn into a mermaid when he hit water. But if someone had asked him a few hours ago, he would have said nobody turned into a mermaid when they touched water. And then Purpled did.

If it really was that Moon Pool, they all got pulled into that special little moment. Logically speaking...

“You know what that means.” Tommy said, beaming at Tubbo. “Swim with me.”

Tubbo lunged at him but he wasn’t fast enough to catch Tommy before the other leaped into the water with a whoop of joy. The boat lurched and Tubbo screeched as arms wrapped around him, pulling him back in before he could dive.

“Sorry, sorry!” Ranboo said, wincing as an elbow hit him. “But-but I can’t pull him out alone.”

“Don’t tip over the boat!” Purpled yelled. But Tubbo ignored him, more focused on where Tommy, stupid, lovable Tommy had jumped into the water.

“He could get hurt! Tommy! Tommy!” Tubbo screamed, trying to get to the water. The biggest thing Tommy had ever swam in was that stupid Moon Pool. What if there was a riptide? A freak wave?

“I’m fine!” Tommy peeked over the side of the boat. “This is seriously sick!”

Tubbo leaned forward and Ranboo let out a surprised noise as he was pulled along. Purpled leaned over the side of the boat.

“Guess Ranboo was right.” Purpled said, leaning back. “That’s a mermaid.”

There was no mistaking it. Tubbo felt his breath catch in his chest as he looked at Tommy. It was still him. That was easy to see.

But it was so strange to see his best friend with scales. Red and white ones, that dotted his cheeks instead of his freckles. Red and white frills billowed out in the water around him, the patchy pattern looking more like a fancy koi than Purpled's betta fish streaks.

"I think I can breath underwater now." Tommy said, still smiling. His teeth looked sharper now. "Incredibly pogchamp! I kind of sucked in a little and it made my chest feel weird but then I blew it all out of the odd fucking gills thing and it feels fine now!"

Tubbo let out a long slow sigh. "Tommy." He said. "I'm going to kill you."

Okay, so maybe he fucked up. He was a big man! He could admit his mistakes!

Tubbo could stop yelling about it now, okay? Tommy winced, paddling around a bit. He'd gotten a bit better with the tail thing, even if it still felt weirdly foreign. He had too, Tubbo had nearly strangled him and he decided a retreat where Tubbo couldn't reach him was a perfectly manly option to pick.

It would probably be another five minutes until Tubbo settled down. Three to five business days before his vindictive plan to get even came to fruition.

That left him plenty of time to get acquainted with his tail. Because the Great and Powerful Tommyinnit was a mermaid. Merman actually. He'd figure out the terms later, Ranboob probably knew some trivia fact about that.

Tommy flicked his tail, zipping a bit further down. He was fast as hell. It was easy to learn how to use his tail when motivated. And Tubbo's murderous lunges, only held back by scrawny Ranboo, definitely counted as motivation in his expert opinion.

And even cooler, his eyes didn't sting from the salt anymore! No more seawater stings for the big man! Tubbo would probably find it exciting but he was kind of fucking murderous right now.

Overreaction in his opinion. What kind of world wouldn't let a man throw himself into the ocean and turn into a sea creature? A terrible one.

Tommy tuned out the faint yells, scanning the sea around him. He could see little flashes of movement in the water. Fish, maybe? They stood out oddly brightly to his eyes.

A bigger flash. Tommy drifted closer, curious. A boat? Some dumbass who decided this was a fun swimming area? Another twist of movement, the sunlight dappling off something big.

His stomach dropped and Tommy let out a panicked screech starting to flail back towards the boat.

THAT WAS A FUCKING SHARK.

LOOK. Sharks were sick! Tommy was pretty sure he was prime shark whisperer material. But that fucker was swimming towards him like someone had put a neon sign up declaring him a free lunch and it was like twice his fucking size!

That wasn't fair! He was the biggest man in the ocean! Who gave it the right to grow bigger than him?

And really fucking fast. Tommy got halfway to the boat before he had to zip to the side with a panicked tail twitch, just barely missing the shark as it charged past. It turned, lining up for another run like the soulless torpedo it was inside.

Tommy looked at the boat and then at the shark. He didn't like those odds. He was fast but look, he'd been fucking around mostly. He wasn't quite sure how to unlock super speed outside short bursts. So now would be a real great fucking great time for Tubbo to actually develop telepathy with him!

"Nice sharky." Tommy said but it came out in a cloud of bubbles. He tried to swim backwards, but this time Evil Demon Shark was locked in. He zipped to the side but this time, it twisted after him. "Oh shit, shit, fuck, damn--"

The shark brushed against a fin and this time Tommy really screamed, high and sharp, the sound coming from deep in his chest.

He wasn't ready to die! He had so many wives to marry, people to scam, and a Queen to meet! He couldn't fucking go out to some Evil Demon Shark!

Tommy swam. The shark swam faster and Tommy screamed again when he twisted and saw it lunging.

And then something big crashed into the shark.

Big and pink.

Chapter End Notes

I've finally settled on a upload schedule for this fic! I'll be posting uploads every Wednesday.

I really enjoyed writing the mer (they'll figure out the species name eventually) scenes. Especially scenes where instincts are starting to appear.

Poor Tommy forgot the reason Mako Island is called that. Poor Purpled isn't getting paid enough for this.

Catch of the Day

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tommy watched with wide eyes and the big thing coin, effortlessly slamming into the shark with a crunch that almost reverberated through his chest. It moved so fast, pouncing and pulling back the shark when it tried to flee that it looked less like a creature and more like a pink whirlwind.

Blood began to fill the water. Blood that was definitely not from whatever the pink thing was.

This was so awesome. Tommy whooped in excitement, watching as the demon shark got absolutely owned by the pink thing! This was so seriously sick, it was even better than those monster films one of their families let them watch.

The pink thing whirled and smacked and tore until the shark was down for the count! Wam, bam, slam! Tommy swirled in the water, cautiously mimicking a few movements.

It was as the movements changed that he suddenly realized that he was still in the water. The pink thing has slowly stopped as the shark's struggle began to slow. And with a wary thudding of his heart, Tommy suddenly realized that it knew he was here.

Uh. So that was probably a really bad thing. Like a seriously bad thing. Like an oh shit this was a bad thing.

That thing just shanked that fucking shark. The same shark that almost ate Tommy. Tommy didn't know much about the food chain but he imagined that did not give him very favorable odds, not that he couldn't take it, but look. He was tired and suddenly swimming seemed just a little bit less appealing after he watched a shark get-

A crunching sound.

-ripped in half. That shark just got ripped in half. Whoever that was just ripped a shark in half. He didn't have to have Tubbo nagging him to know that maybe it was time to get the fuck out of here.

"Haha, yeah. I'll just, get out of your way, big man!" Tommy said, the words coming out as bubbles. The pink one slowly shifted, the strange loops and fans slowly moving aside but Tommy didn't wait for an answer, bolting to the surface. He needed to get out of here ASA-fucking-P.

And then something shook the water. Like capital S shook. Not in the funny meme way either. The sound reverberated in his chest, making his movements go limp and slow for one second.

A weird fog slipped across his brain. This was fine. Everything was fine. Why wouldn't it be fine? He was safe. He was very safe. There were no more sharks here.

He just- he had to- do what? He couldn't quite remember. Tommy drifted to a stop, not quite sure where to go from here, brain still fogged and unthinking.

Something brushed against his tail.

Every nerve in his body suddenly shot alive all at once and Tommy screamed, slamming it down in a powerful strike. He hauled tail to the boat, paddling desperately. Whatever the fuck that was ripped a shark and half and had funky sound drugs. He was fucking done with the ocean. Fuck this shit.

Tommy was so close. He had been working towards the boat anyways to flee the shark that he could already see the dark shadow it made against the surface. He stroked faster, ignoring the creeping exhaustion in his arms and tail, breathing in so fast his sides were starting to hurt.

Just a little bit further. A little bit faster. The boat was right above him, as soon as he broke the surface, he could be lifted into the boat and then they'd beat a strategic retreat. Just a little bit further. Mere feet below the surface.

He screamed again as something brushed against his tail. And then grabbed it. Tommy clawed at the water as he started to be dragged down. "Let me go!" He screamed. "Let me go!"

Tommy reached to the boat, hoping Tubbo saw him: that the other could help. He didn't want to die like this. The shark had been bad but this was worse. He didn't want to die at all.

There was that weird reverberating sound again and Tommy screamed again. He didn't want to go to rain fog again. Brain fog meant death because he could defend himself. He threw himself at the surface one more time, hoping the other would let go.

There was a muted thud and a wave of bubbles exploded from the surface. Something dark streaked past him, slamming into the pink thing.

The anchor. They had thrown the anchor at it. The reverberating sound cut off as the grip on his tail loosened. With one powerful movement, Tommy shot up to the surface, nearly leaping out of the water.

He was caught by too warm hands under his arms. Tubbo's normally calm eyes were wild, terrified. "Help me!" He shrieked at Purpled and the other boy scrambled forward, hands joining Tubbo's Tommy went limp, letting them drag him out of the water.

He landed in the bottom of the boat with a thud, gasping for air. It had never tasted so sweet before. Tubbo fell on top of him, less of a hug and more of a desperate hold.

"I thought you were gone forever." Tubbo babbled to him. "We saw the shark as it temporarily breached the surface and then the fin turned towards you and I didn't know what

to think. I thought you were dead and I didn't know what to do."

The last few words were raw, hurt. He had never heard Tubbo so terrified before, even in their worst homes.

Tommy curled into Tubbo, fighting to get his breathing to even out. "Not even a chance." He said, the joke was weak and they both knew it. "What, a shark against me? I could send that bitch running."

None of them mention that something ripped the shark in half. That that something was still in the water outside their boat and they had just thrown an anchor at it.

It seemed like ruining the moment.

"This is a very touching moment but we need to focus! Gun it!" Purpled yelled at Ranboo. He reached down, yanking on the chain next to Tommy. "Just hit the lever all the way forward! I'll get the anchor all the way up."

"Oh shit." Tubbo said. "Sorry big man, got to make sure you don't die. Stay here and dry out like the literal fish you are."

"Hey! Fuck your!" Tommy said, scrambling up. Tubbo was quicker, moving to the side of the boat and yanking on the anchor chain. Tommy joined them after only a moment, looking down into the water as he pulled on the chain.

For just a moment, he saw the pink thing, reaching towards the anchor. It began to reach for the chain, ready to bring their retreat to a halt.

Fueled with desperate strength, Tommy grabbed onto the anchor as well, yanking hard. At the last second, the anchor shut up and Purpled yanked it fully into the boat, causing Tubbo to fall back with a wheeze. The boat roared to life fully, sending them jetting across the water.

"It's following!" Tubbo yelled. Tommy could see a blue of pink in the water, following their boat.

"There's nothing alive that can catch up to Dogchamp." Purpled sneered, moving to the back of the boat. He nearly shoved Ranboo out of the seat, grabbing onto the lever. With a crackling pop that did not sound good, he slammed the lever all the way down and the boat picked up speed.

Tommy watched as the pink thing sped through the water, heart beating against his ribs. For a moment it looked like the pink thing would catch up.

But instead it peeled away, heading back into the ocean. Tommy watched it go, hoping against hope that that meant they were done. That they were free. And then with a wheeze, he slumped back into the bottom of the boat.

"We're free fuckers!" He yelled. "We beat it!"

“Oh thank god.” Ranboo said, slumping to the bottom of the boat with him. “I thought we were actually dead there man. It really looked like it was going to catch up to the boat and kill us.”

“Probably could have. It ripped that shark in half.” Tommy said, gesturing with his hands the shark being ripped in half. Ranboo let out a broken moan, slumping further into the bottom of the boat like that could give him protection if he merged into the boards.

“We’ll, that was close. Maybe next time you’ll think before you jump into the ocean.” Tubbo mumbled, swatting Tommy over the head. “It’s called Mako Island for a reason! There’s sharks all around the area and that’s the least of it!”

“We’re not that close to the island!”

“Do you not understand what I mean when I say there are sharks in the area? That doesn’t mean just around the island!” Tubbo said, making mock strangling motions. Aw, he really was worried. Tommy rolled his eyes, turning back to Purpled’s.

“In more important news.” He said, ignoring Tubbo’s screech of rage. “How are you a person? With two legs?”

“Well, when a mom and a dad tolerate each other very much-“ Purpled drawled, keeping his eyes on the sea ahead. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“You know what I mean!” He said, gesturing at Purpled and then at him. The last time he saw Purpled he was half fish. Now, the boy was dressed in his normal clothes, as boringly juman as ever. There wasn’t even a single sign of scale.

He was pretty sure he would have noticed someone lobbing costume pieces in the ocean. Tubbo snickered behind him.

“Basically, after a little while when you were playing in the ocean, Purpled went all glowy magical girl transformation. And suddenly turned back. And he doesn’t want to talk about it because-“

“Finish that sentence and I’ll be driving back and throwing you overboard for whatever that sea monster was.” Purpled said, glaring at Tubbo. Tubbo glared back, never one to turn down a test of wills.

Ranboo coughed, interrupting their staring contest. “We think it’s possibly because he dried off? Well, I think so. Tubbo thought it was silly and that it was probably because of some other reason.”

“Well, you have to admit we turn into mermaids when we’re wet and human when you’re dry is a pretty abysmal way to arrange it!” Tubbo said, looking at Tommy. “Back me up here, Big T.”

“You just want to experiment on us, you fucking mad scientist.” Tommy said, pushing himself up so he could seat at Tubbo’s shoulder affectionately. “I know you like a chess game

or something.”

“That’s not what that saying is.” Ranboo mumbled into the boat. Tommy rolled his eyes again, flipping his entire weight on top of the other and listening to him wheeze.

“Yes, it is Ranboob.” He said, rolling his eyes. He watched the ocean flash past, seeing the glare off the wave. “End of conversation.”

“I don’t think that’s how conversation works.” Ranboo said. “I’m almost certain that’s not how conversation works.”

“Hush.”

“Aw, somebody’s tired.” Tubbo teased, picking up on the little signals. Tommy barely managed a hiss when Tubbo leaned against them both, burning warm compared to his still cold skin.

They weee all silent for a long moment, watching as the ocean went by. It was beautiful, in a terrifying way. Purpled slowed the boat down to a more manageable speed when it started making odd noises.

In his mind eye, he could still see the shark being torn in half.

“Hey, Tommy?” Tubbo said, following his gaze. “You saw it better than we did, didn’t you? Purpled said he could see better underwater. What was the thing chasing you?”

“I didn’t see much. It was moving too fast.” Tommy said, avoiding Tubbo’s eyes. Tubbo watched him for a long moment but finally nods, turning away. Knowing without him saying it that Tommy wasn’t ready to talk. Not yet.

Because he did know what he saw. Caught in a moment after the shark ripped apart, as red began to fill the water and the monster turned to look at him. He couldn’t mistake it.

Because the monster looked just like him.

Except bigger. And pinker. So not that much, he guessed. But enough that he wasn’t sure what to do next.

Techno was having a very trippy day.

If he didn’t know better, he would have thought Wilbur snuck a sea snake into the nest again and it had bitten him. He swam slowly through the dim waters, eyes locked onto the destination ahead. He dragged a halved shark after him.

No sense in wasting a good meal. Shark was prime meat and he enjoyed the occasional dinner of shark meat.

It could have been a hallucination. In fact, he still half thought it was. Because he could not have seen what he thought he had seen. It was impossible.

Anger and excitement still simmered in his veins. He wanted to move. He wanted to shipwreck a ship, rip apart another shark, he wanted to cut at something.

He slowly began to follow the curve of the underwater beach as it dropped into a cavern. Phil was going to lose his mind after this.

The water shifted. Techno rolled his eyes. "If you thought that would work, I'm putting you through remedial hunting." He said, words crooning through the water. There was a cheery whistle and Techno shifted effortlessly, letting the clumsy lunge go right past him.

"Okay, you're definitely going into remedial hunting for that." Techno said, glaring. The sail was flared, arms still dragging in the water, not even claws out. "If you tried to go at a mako shark with that, you'd be dead."

"Well, I'm not trying to go after a mako shark. I'm trying to get you." Wilbur complained, drifting back to swim at Techno's side.

"And?" Techno said, looking Wilbur up and down. It was clear by now that the other was unlikely to be the protector of the pod or his own pod. He had never put on muscle like Techno had, hadn't taken to hunting like a shark in a group of tuna.

"Rude." Wilbur said, rolling his eyes as he flipped. "Shark? What's the occasion? I thought hunting those things annoyed you because they kept zooming around and you got tired of chasing them with your tired old bones?"

"Heh?" Techno said. "I stopped hunting them because Phil started bitching that they were going extinct."

"Techno's getting old." Wilbur sang. He yelped as Techno swiped at him, sending him tumbling into the side of the cavern. "Rude! Hurtful! Oh, podmate of mine, how could you hurt me so?"

"Save the dramatics." Techno said, rolling his eyes. Just a hit further and Phil could deal with his pup. He made it, he had responsibility for it.

"Oh, now I know something is up. You might think that you're clever but I know you Technoblade." Wilbur said, brown eyes glinting. "I know all about you."

"What's with the cheap dramatics? Have you been spending time with that Pod down south again? With... What's his name? James? Jay?" Techno mumbled. None of them sounded right.

"This is why he hates you." Wilbur said. Techno shrugged. Whoever it was, he had kicked the other mer's tail. It was Wilbur alone that had kept the other from being ripped apart and he had played that life debt like an anglerfish luring in prey. "But no, I know something is up. You normally let me go on for much longer. Something is going on and you're being cagey."

"Oh, look, we're back at the nest." Techno said, ignoring Wilbur's offended noises as he pulled forward, towards the familiar rock face. Home sweet home. He slipped easily through

the cave mouth, ignoring Wilbur's anger-

"I know you're ignoring me, Techno! You- you misbegotten son of a jellyfish! You--"

Hm, should they widen the entrance to the main cavern? He had liked the smaller entrance area but now it felt oddly cramped. They needed more room. He needed more room.

"Where did you learn that language?" Phil said, drifting out of one of the tunnels. Feathers were still tangled in his hair, he must have paid a visit to the surface. "I know I didn't teach that to you."

"Yes you did." Techno mumbled. He had heard Phil. That other could play stoic king of the seas all he wanted but it was just an act.

"You can't prove anything." Philza said. He arched a brow at the still bleeding shark. "I thought we agreed not to hunt anymore of those even if they were, quote, 'really asking for it, look at the smug fish'."

"It was an accident." He ignored both of his podmates skeptical glances at the shark which had clearly been meticulously ripped in half. "Ignore that."

"Spill." Wilbur demanded, streaking by and spinning to a stop by the tunnel to the main cavern. "What did you see? A new type of shark? A rock that looks like a potato? Some asshole humans to drown?"

Techno bared his teeth at the last one. That would be important. That would be very important. But it wasn't all the news.

"Ha! I got you pinned now! What did they do, break your favorite coral reef--"

"I saw a baby mer."

Wilbur and Philza went very very quiet. Techno allowed himself to be smug that he had shut both of them up for once. "That's a serious piece of news." Philza said, folding his arms. He had the flint in his eyes. The Dangerous Glint. The 'adopt something' glint that had a very lost manatee staying in their territory for two years.

At least this was better than the manatee. "I saw it, Philza." He choked a bit on the next words, something that normally never happened. "They still had their baby fins and everything."

Normally as mer aged, their fins stayed the same until they reached full size. The only change most found were spines or a slight shift in colors appearing. Techno had grown into his fins normally but Wilbur's fins had revealed poisonous spines along them, something he had gotten from his mother.

But what it meant was that the fins of a baby mer were oversized for them. Ridiculously, and definitely not adorably so. He knew they were some kind of weird defense mechanic that made the pups look a little bigger and more threatening as they grew.

He didn't know who it was fooling but it made fins a good enough indicator for age that he knew for sure what he saw. Even if it was impossible.

"But that's impossible." Wilbur blurted. "All of the other pods would have sung the news for weeks. And it's definitely not Phil's."

"And why is that you little shits?" Phil said affectionately, folding his arms. "I could have had another pup. Kristin wouldn't have been against it. I don't tell you everything."

Techno and Wilbur shared a look, for once agreeing on the same thing.

"You'd have been mooning for weeks. You always are when you see Kristin."

"When you guys were preparing for Wilbur, you nearly sent me down the abyssal zone and back up. I'd know."

"Well, fine then. I can keep secrets." Philza said, rolling his eyes. "See if I tell you about our next date."

"Please don't." Techno deadpanned. He would tear apart the world for his podmate, but that didn't mean he enjoyed hearing him moon over his mate. To hear him talk, their dates were the most lovely times in the ocean.

"The pup, Technoblade!" Wilbur broke in, practically whistling in excitement. It gave his normal clicks an airy quality. "Who cares about dad's weird date nights. I want to hear about the new pup!"

"They're young." Techno said with a shrug, dropping the shark pieces to the cavern floor. A few bait fish fluttered around it, snacks and cleaning crew in one. He looked at Phil.

"Incredibly young. They weren't even the length of my tail and they were practically drowning in their frills. They couldn't have been more than half a century. I found them fleeing from a shark."

"Opportunistic little shits." Philza said, but his gaze darkened slightly. Looked like shark was going back on the menu.

"Are they okay? Where was their pod?" Wilbur said, stealing a slice from the shark. Techno boredly swiped at him but Wilbur just laughed, dodging away. It was a worried laugh though, lacking the whistle. "You assholes didn't let me out of the nest until I was three centuries old and even then you were still clingy."

"It's called being careful! There's a lot in the ocean that would kill a baby mer, and the son of me and Kristin? We weren't going to risk you." Philza said, reaching out reflexively to grab Wilbur's arm to reassure himself.

"Ocean knows you were trying to to get yourself killed sometimes." Techno grumbled. Wilbur hadn't had to deal with the moray eel he aggravated, or the feeding frenzy of sharks, or the angry whales or- he shook his head, radiating aggravation. "And no pod. I checked the area too. There's no signs of a new pod moving in. I didn't see any pod marks or hear any

songs on the current. The mer pup was completely alone. Anything could kill it Phil! The shark nearly took a chunk out of its fins, if I didn't hear it's panic call and the humans--“

He choked off the words, narrowing his eyes at Philza's smug look. The feathers in his hair. The mischievous glint in his eyes. “Your bizarre feathered rats told you about the pup already.”

“I don't know what you're talking about, mate.” Philza said, looking innocent. Which immediately made Techno even more suspicious. “C'mon what would that do for me?”

“Get his protector instincts riled so he won't care about bringing in another pup?” Wilbur said. He shrugged at Philza's betrayed look. “You should have told me about it and that's all I have to say for you.”

“Fine, mate. But in my defense, you threatened to go into a blood rage on the next wounded animal I dragged to the nest and adopted.” Philza said. “I had to make sure. It's a baby. A little baby, all alone in the world.”

“I wouldn't have killed a pup.” Techno said, rolling his eyes. “And you know it. And if you had told me about it, I could have picked it up before the humans stole it.”

“The humans stole it?” Philza said, his voice beginning the rise and shriek. The currents in the area began to speed up, tugging ominously at Techno's fins. “The humans stole a mer pup? And you let them?”

“I did not!” Techno roared back. “I didn't know where the pup was from and by the time I realized there was no pod in the area and that it was foolishly going towards a boat, the humans pulled them in!”

He was going to destroy that boat next time he saw it, now that he had it confirmed. In his haze of excitement and battle rush, he had let a pup get stolen by the humans.

What would they do to it? Rip it's scales out? Cut away its fins? Humans were monsters and leaving a precious pup with them was a recipe for disaster. If it hadn't been for the boat's speed, he would have ripped the wood to shreds and freed the pup from them. Now, he had to plan for a rescue.

And an investigation. Who thought it was a good idea to let a pup get lost?

Unless...

No. They would have been told if that place had finally worked.

“We have to find it.” Wilbur insisted, darting towards the exit. Techno reached out, grabbing onto his tail with one hand. “Let go! I need to look around.”

“Not a point right now. We'll send the feathered rats out first. At this point, they've already made it back to shore and there's not a chance you can swim fast enough to catch up to them if they didn't.” Techno growled, jerking his head at Philza. He hated pup sitting but someone had to keep Wilbur from getting himself killed.

“I can handle it!” Wilbur insisted. “I’m centuries old and of age at this point! You can’t treat me like a pup!”

“We’re not treating you like a pup.” Philza soothed, drifting closer. He rubbed a hand of Wilbur’s facial fins, soothing away the other’s nerves. “I know you’re raring to go. But if you get yourself captured as well, I don’t know what I’d do.”

“Kill them all.” Techno coughed.

“Yes, but still.” Philza said. “And we have to make sure the pup is okay first before we move in. I won’t forgive myself if a pup gets hurt on my watch.”

“Fine. But if any of the humans Touch it, I’ll sing them until they throw themselves into the ocean and drown.” Wilbur snarled. Techno swam down, picking up the shark with one hand and towing Wilbur towards the nest with the other. “I can swim, you know!”

“You’re bitching too much to do much of anything.” Techno said lazily. “Food first, or the flying rats will be insufferable.”

“You love them.” Philza reminded, swimming beside them. “Besides, they’ll keep an eye on the pup while we can’t. Find out where it came from and why nobody knew.”

“They better.”

He wondered what the pup was doing right now. With the humans and not having a protector to guard it or a caregiver to soothe away its tears and fear.

Moonlight crept in through the open window, the smell of salt filling the air. Tubbo watched as it crept further and further across the floor, focusing on the soothing rise and fall of Tommy’s chest next to him.

That was close today. Really close. If it hadn’t been for the sea creature, Tommy would be dead. Maybe. Tubbo had been about to fling himself into the water, possible transformation be damned. He would have fought any sharks to the death and been glad to do it.

That didn’t mean that even the slightest hint wasn’t enough to make his head ring with alarms and have his heart beating fast, even hours after they had stumbled into shore, Tommy thankfully human again.

It had been funnier earlier, in the light of day. Comparing it to teen dramas and magical girl transformations. In the dark, with only the moonlight and Tommy’s gentle breathing for company, his mind kept him awake with every danger in the shadows.

Government. The monster in the water. Sharks.

Clem. She had been nice. She gave them a room together, food on a regular basis, even money for school lunches. But would she be nice if she knew that they could transform into fish people? Would she be as kind or as thoughtful? Would any foster family?

They had been outcasts, hurt and insulted, but they had still been human. The line in the sand had been foggy, prejudice he could ignore and plan around. Now it had become more distinct, more obvious.

They were inhuman. Tommy and Purpled confirmed, but he was almost certain he and Ranboo were the same. And the thought of it, of something uncontrolled that he couldn't plan around, made him jittery with nerves. He didn't know what to do.

Google didn't have convenient guides on what to do if you suddenly turned into a mermaid, merman, whatever. Not even a wiki how. He had found a library of "spells" to become a mermaid, ranging from something he'd believe as a toddler to 'pretty sure blood sacrifices are illegal'. Not a single mention of the Moon Pool.

Something had changed their entire DNA and he had no clue as to what and how it affected them. Was it why the pizza was so terrible? Or was that a minor cold like he thought earlier?

Even the legends didn't really talk much about mermaids. There was a fringe theory, the one the others had brought up before, but it was widely ridiculed. Fuck, he would have ridiculed it, even as he goaded Tommy into investigating it with him. In a world with submarines and sonar, mermaids should be well known. The theory itself was one sentence in a Wikipedia article and an Instagram reply to a islander surf event from a deactivated account, ItsFundy, saying 'watch out for the killer mer!'.

If it wasn't for Tommy dragging him to bed, he wouldn't be here right now. Part of him still wanted to shake off the creeping exhaustion of the day and go back to his phone to keep searching. The other part didn't want to wake Tommy who was curled up with him in the same bed. Neither had said anything but they had picked the same bed, not even arguing over Tubbo's snoring habit or Tommy's suffocating clinginess.

What was he supposed to do? He needed to be the smart one here, the guy with the plan. But the entire day, he felt like he had been constantly scrambling. What if someone had seen Purpled? What if the monster had caught up with the boat? Was it still out there? Would it be hunting them?

And Tommy hadn't talked to him. Him. He knew when Tommy was leaving something unsaid. Tommy had lied to him when he asked about the creature. Did he not trust Tubbo? Was he not good enough at planning? What was he supposed to do? Could he-

A hand pressed against his cheek. Tommy rolled on top of him. "Stop thinking so much and go to bed." He mumbled, immediately slumping back over.

Tubbo took a deep breath, squeezing his eyes shut. He could handle this. This was just a small hurdle. He knew exactly what to do.

It would look better in the morning.

Anxiety and mermaid secrets can be rough.

Also, sleepy boys introduction! They still don't know where or why Tommy is but they're gonna try to figure it out.

Party Girls

Chapter Notes

The boys are Stressed.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

By the time they had arrived at school, Tubbo had a twenty step plan for making sure their secret would never ever be discovered. It would go to the grave with them. Their great grandchildren would never even know.

And if someone did find out, he had three plans for what to do next! And only two involved murder.

They'd past through the school like wraiths-

And then he saw the invitations ever so invitingly placed on their desks.

Nice invitations too! Crisp creamy paper, heavy envelopes. It had the fancy golden paint edging too. Honestly, he kind of wanted to steal it.

But the content. He didn't even have to look at it to know who it was from. He could already see them laughing at their desks, sending smug glances at their table like it was the cleverest thing ever.

Tubbo wanted to bite them so badly. So bad. Was that a crime? It shouldn't be.

Clay Whitmore would cordially like to invite you to-

A fucking pool party. They had gotten invited to a pool party? Look, he wasn't against pools, in fact, he kinda thought that was a cool teen drama thing but this was... a trap on so many levels. Tubbo shuddered, carefully pushing it away from him.

One splash of water and they were screwed. He hadn't started testing how much water yet but a pool party just seemed like a bad idea.

"We're definitely not going to that." He said to Tommy. But to his surprise, Tommy frowned.

"Why the fuck not? Shitheads invited us. It's a challenge. I say we take them up on it. Better than being a coward." Tommy answered, slamming the invite on the desk and glaring at it looking like it personally owed him money.

Tubbo chewed his bottom lip, thoughts racing as he tapped on the desk. "But what about the thing?" He whispered. The thing made going to a pool a very dangerous game right now.

“But if we don’t go, they’ll call us cowards.” Tommy pointed out. But Tubbo didn’t care if they were called cowards! He hated it, yeah, but this felt like something far more dangerous.

If they made one wrong move, they could be dissected. Or killed. Tubbo wanted to break into Area 51, he didn’t want to be part of Area 51! How to make Tommy see that though?

“I’m not going anyways.” Purpled said, tossing the invitation aside. He put his head back down on the desk, completely ignoring them to focus on the phone he just pulled out. “Leave me out of this.”

Ranboo frowned. “Normally Clay doesn’t invite us to these kinds of parties. They’re kind of wild, I hear, he thinks it’s a badge of honor if the police get called. Tons of people want to go but he usually invites his in group only.”

Tubbo gestured at Ranboo, saying: see! Trap! There was no way this would ever end well. In fact it was far more likely to end really really badly.

The last time they took a bet from Clay, they became fish people. He had no doubt this invitation had some strings attached.

“More reasons we shouldn’t.” Tubbo said stubbornly. “We have better things to do anyways.”

“Like what?” Tommy said and Tubbo’s eyebrows went up when he heard the challenge in it. Why? It was a bad idea? Why did Tommy want to do it?

“Going back to Mako island.”

Ranboo went pale, well, as pale as he could. “That doesn’t seem like a good idea.” He said, lowering his voice and casting furtive glances around. Exactly the kind of attention getting behavior that people zeroed in on. “Why do we need to go back there?”

“We agreed the curse is from there, right?” Tubbo said. He nodded firmly, hoping his nerves weren’t showing in his voice. “So, we need to go back and see if there’s anything we can do. Maybe there’s an off switch or something.”

Purpled snorted. “I wish you guys had an off switch.” He mumbled into his desk. “I’m not a fucking taxi.”

Ranboo slowly slipped a wad of bills across the desk. Purpled snatched it up. “One more ride and I’m done.” He warned. Tubbo blinked, frowning.

“But-“

He wasn’t sure what to say. What was he supposed to say to that? It shouldn’t annoy him that Purpled was done. After all, he had plenty of blackmail on Purpled, mutual destruction and all that. Purpled leaving shouldn’t be a problem at all.

But it felt like a problem. It felt like a big problem, one that made his heart speed up and thud against his ribs. He wanted to drag Purpled back into the group, make him admit that he was part of this, one of the group.

It made him uncomfortable, feelings layering in a dizzying array that had him tapping even faster on the desk. Because this didn't feel right, it felt wrong, and wasn't that fun to deal with when he already had so much on his plate.

He shook his head, unable to form words. Tubbo glanced down at the invitation. "No point in going." He repeated. "We need to figure this out first."

"Fine." Tommy said, slumping in his chair and glaring moodily at the invitation. "I'll message out the location when we decide on it."

"Fine." Tubbo echoed, leaving it at a shrug. If doing something would make Tommy feel better, than all the better for it. He didn't like seeing Tommy sad.

"Still the same place." Purpled mumbled. Ranboo patted his shoulder. Purpled hissed and Ranboo slowly pulled away.

Just for a bit, he reminded himself. Once they had this all figured out, they could go to as many pool parties as Tommy wanted. They just had to get this figured out first.

But that didn't make him feel better when Tommy ended up splitting from him after school, saying he wanted to go to the gift shops and not to wait for him.

Tubbo had hung around the dock, trying hard not to look too weird. He had exactly figured out many good spots on the island and he didn't want to go home, even as the shadows began to draw across the dark.

They had decided to go under the cover of night again so now one would question where they were going. Clem was at work so it's not like he had to worry about staying out too late.

But still. Where was Tommy? He should have been there by now. And Ranboo! Ranboo seemed like the type who was usually early for things.

"My gods, you look like someone killed your pet fish and then ate it in front of you. Stop pacing." Someone said behind him. Tubbo winced, turning to see Purpled. The other was busting himself with unweaving a tangled net.

Tubbo slowed to a stop, fading across the dock. Even late at night, it was still a bit busy, people working on preparing for the next day and cleaning up after this one. "Just wondering where they are." He said softly.

"Well, wonder quieter." Purpled snapped, turning back to his net. Tubbo carefully stepped into the boat, settling down at the bench.

"You doing good, man?" He asked, watching as Purpled deftly worked through a stubborn tangle. "You've been kind of snappy all day."

"This is taxi session, not therapy session." Purpled snapped. Tubbo winced a little leaning back on the bench.

"I know but if you're worried--"

Purpled threw down the net with a heavy thump, making Tubbo jump. Before he could ask what was wrong, Purpled threw the rope tie off of the dock and kicked in the motor, pulling out of the dock at speed

“Wait, what the fuck!” Tubbo said, jumping to his feet before immediately flopping back down as the boat rocked. “You can’t leave now! They’re still coming!”

Purpled snorted, rolling his eyes. “They’re most definitely not coming.” He said. “They tricked us. Probably at the party right now.”

“Tommy wouldn’t.” Tubbo insisted. But he hesitated. Because Tommy probably would. He had been so worked up over the party earlier that it wasn’t out of the question he would want to go.

...it was just normally he’d talk to Tubbo first. Tubbo stared at the water rushing by, wondering what he did wrong. Was he too insistent? Did he annoy Tommy with his plans again?

“Oh gods, he’s worse now.”

Tommy was pretty sure he’d thought this through right.

Because look, he loved Tubbo! Big man was the best! He had plans for all sorts of stuff. But he was kind of ‘can’t see the forest for the trees’ kind of person. Which was cool but he just could not see that they couldn’t miss this pool party. That it was vital to attend.

Which was why Tommy would! And he had even arranged his own back up so Tubbo couldn’t get annoyed that he went in alone. Tubbo could go off and explore the weird island but he’d be having fun here! And making sure Clay didn’t get anymore ammo.

“Wait, is this Clay’s house?” Ranboo said, straightening up a bit. “Why are we docking at Clay’s house?”

Okay, so maybe they weren’t aware they were back up. But he was pretty sure that it was the thought that counted!

“We’re not.” Tommy said with a shrug, innocently slipping his phone back into his pocket.

Ranboo stared at him suspiciously. “Tommy, I thought you said we were moving the meeting location because Purpled had to move Dogchamp.” He said. “I trusted you.”

“But it did move!” Tommy insisted. “I’m certain his boat did move very slightly when he landed it again at the pier. And our meeting location did move because we’re meeting in a different place now. So, really, if you think about it, I didn’t lie and you should apologize to me for accusing me of lying.”

Ranboo took a deep breath. “Tommy, I don’t think this is a good idea.”

“Why not?” Tommy groaned. When he had decided to invite Ranboob, he was hoping they wouldn’t argue with him like Tubbo did. In fact, that was his main goal. But of course he had to develop a backbone now.

“You heard Tubbo! This is kind of dangerous now.” Ranboo said, glancing at the glowing house in front of him. “And I really don’t think Clay invited us out of the goodness of his heart.”

“It’ll be fine.” Tommy said, waving a hand. “We just have to avoid water, right? If we do that then we’re golden and we get to show up Clay.”

“Tommy-“

Tommy was capital D Done with this. He turned around, marching toward the house. He didn’t care about getting splashed with a little water! He was the great Tommyinnit! The big man himself! He wasn’t scared of some water or some weird bullies!

Ranboo let out a very tired sigh, hurrying after Tommy. “I want this on the record for Tubbo that I disagreed with this.” He mumbled as Tommy went around the side, pushing the gate open. “Maybe he’ll give me a head start before he kills me.”

“He won’t.” Tommy dismissed. Tubbo didn’t believe in mercy like that. If someone was stupid, he considered it his godgiven right to destroy them.

“Right. Remind me why I’m doing this again.” Ranboo said. He winced as a wave of blasting music hit them as soon as Tommy pushed open the gate. “Because this is a really bad idea. For the record.”

Tommy ignored him, whistling when he saw the yard. For what a piece of work Clay was, his yard was an absolute masterpiece. Sprawling, with bright green grass leading to an absolutely massive pool. One of the fancy ones with a waterfall and a little wooden hut next to it.

And absolutely packed too. There were a ton of people, across all grade levels. Not many turned to look when he and Ranboo stepped inside.

“Boys, I thought you wouldn’t make it.” Clay said, a smirk plastered on his face. He was sticking his feet in the pool, surrounded by the other idiot bullies. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Shouldn’t have fucking invited us then.” He shot back, grabbing Ranboo by the arm and dragging him around the side of the pool until he found a chair.

“Don’t be like that! Aren’t we all friends here?” Clay said. It was noticeable how the party quieted down slightly, like everyone was holding their breath and waiting to see what would happen next. Bunch of fuckers.

“Not really. I only showed up because you would have been a massive bitch if I didn’t.” Tommy said. Ranboo put a hand on his shoulder.

“Really.” Clay said. He glanced around, almost theatrically. “And where’s the other one? The creepy hanger on that goes everywhere you go? Finally got sick of him?”

“I know that I would have.” One of the dudes said, snickering. Tommy went bright red. He could almost feel the steam coming out of his ears. Scratch the previous plan, he was going to kill Clay.

As if able to tell what he was thinking, Ranboo’s hand tightened on his shoulder. Tommy hissed without thinking, an almost deceptively soft sound. Then he froze.

Did he just honest to god hiss at Ranboo? Like a fucking snake?

“Don’t talk about Tubbo like that.” Ranboo insisted, stepping up beside him. “He’s really nice. He just doesn’t like you because you’re being an ass.”

Clay leaned forward. “Someone’s feeling gutsy today.” He said. Ranboo met his eyes steadily. “Fine, fine. It’s party time. We can talk later.”

And judging by the dark look in his eyes, it wasn’t going to be a friendly chat. Good. Tommy preferred to let his fists do the talking when he met assholes like Clay. Absolutely unpog man, probably got no women at all, unlike him.

He was startled out of his murderous thinking when Ranboo leaned down by his ear. “So, did you just hiss at me or did I imagine that?” He asked. “Because it really sounded like you hissed at me.”

“Imagined it.” Tommy said. He glared at Ranboo when the other opened their mouth to argue. “You imagine it, big man. I can’t even do that.”

Could he though? He turned into a fish person a day ago. Who’s to say that he couldn’t? Maybe he could hiss and just hadn’t tried to before. He shook Ranboo’s hand off his shoulder. “Don’t touch me. I’m going to go get a drink.”

“Tommy-“

Tommy didn’t listen, slipping off towards the other side of the pool. Why was Ranboo being so talkative today? Tommy didn’t want to talk. He just wanted to cause trouble and get women. Talking was not part of the bargain there.

He stopped by the lackluster drinks table, poking through the offerings. Alcohol, and a lot of it. Tommy couldn’t even touch it. The very smell made his stomach lurch.

There was a sad little punch bowl that was very obviously spiked and smelled like it too. With a scowl, Tommy just filled a cup with water. Better than nothing especially with how parched he got nowadays. He hadn’t mentioned it to Tubbo yet, assuming the other had also picked up on it. Probably had a million theories too.

Tubbo always had a million theories. He just-

Fuck, he didn’t want to think about this. Tommy took a long sip from his water cup, glaring at the pool. Stupid thing. Actually, it looked like a nice pool, but it was stupid because it was Clay’s pool. There were all sorts of nooks and secret shaded areas.

He wanted to jump in. And maybe he should. Maybe he should jump in and show Clay something he should be afraid of because Clay was being way too much of an asshole. Give him a taste of his own medicine, see something real.

Tommy took a few speculative steps towards the pool. There weren't a ton of people over here now. If he played his cards right, he could jump in without fuss.

"Tommy." Someone stepped in front of him. Ranboob. Again. "Tommy, I don't know what you're thinking but it's a really bad idea. Please. Just get away from the pool."

"Why should I?" Tommy challenged.

"Tommy, please." Ranboo said, lowering his voice. He twisted his hands together. "Just don't. I'll owe you a favor. But don't do this right now."

"Fine." Tommy said with a huff, turning away. Maybe later. They couldn't be blocking him all the time.

Ranboo breathed a sigh of relief that quickly cut off with a choke. Tommy spun back around when he heard a roar of laughter, eyes widening. One of the bullies stood where Ranboo was and in the pool-

It was just a blur of black and white for now but it was enough for Tommy to know that Ranboo had transformed. Judging by the laughter ringing around the pool, nobody had noticed yet either, probably thinking of it as Ranboo's clothes.

For a moment, he hesitated. Wasn't this what he wanted? Just a different form of it. People seeing what they were made of.

But then he looked down into the water and saw a glimpse of desperate and afraid eyes. And remembered Tubbo ever so carefully leading Ranboo into the pool. He couldn't. Something told him he needed to protect Ranboo.

Ugh. Feelings.

Tommy glared at the bully, taking a step closer. "Leave him alone." He said, choking slightly as another odd hiss tried to slip out.

Tommy took one step up and socked the guy right in the mouth. "Leave him the fuck alone!" He roared. The guy staggered with the blow, blood beginning to leak from his nose.

"What the fuck are you doing?" He roared back. Tommy bared his teeth, ducking under the return punch. He could still hear Clay's smarmy as fuck laughter and it burned- he wanted him to burn-

A loud yelp pulled him out his thoughts, people were scrambling out of the pool, many cursing or shrieking. "Did the fucking pool heater break? Who the fuck messed with it?" Clay yelled, stomping around the side of the hut.

Most people groaned in disappointment, streaming into the house. Tommy turned back, glaring at the other dude.

“You want me to destroy you now or later now that your buddies aren’t here to back you up?” Tommy spat. The dude looked at him before scoffing.

“I’m getting a fucking drink.” Yeah, he better run. Tommy glared after him before rushing to the side of the pool and kneeling down. The pile of flicker black and white underwater had gone very still.

For a moment his heart beat fast with dismay but nope, he could see that some of the edges were too soft to be clothing. Gleamed a bit too much in the light.

“Ranboo.” He whispered urgently, fighting not to curse as Ranboo’s head popped out of the water. He couldn’t make out much clearly but one side of Ranboo’s face was completely bone white now, the other completely black. It was kind of creepy when he suddenly appeared but then again, it was attached to the guy with a spine made of pudding.

“Tommy.” Ranboo whispered and there was a desperate edge to it. He started clawing at the side of the pool, trying to pull himself out desperately. “I got to- I can’t.”

“I can’t just pull you out.” Tommy whisper yelled back. People were distracted yeah, but there was no way they’d be distracted enough to not notice him carrying out a whole ass fish person. Or long enough for Ranboo to dry out quickly.

Ranboo made a desperate almost grilling sound that put Tommy’s teeth on edge. He force his upper half out of the water and Tommy was forced to scramble forward, trying to prevent the dumbass from knocking himself by head butting the side of the pool.

“Prime, if only you were dry.” He whispered. Ranboo was almost all the way out of the pool now and it was getting increasingly risky others were going to notice. If only he just dried-

His palms tingled suddenly feeling warm and Ranboo let out a startled chirp as suddenly all the fish person attributes just fucking disappeared.

Like magic.

What the fuck?

Tommy and him stared at each other. “What the fuck.” Tommy whispered. “What the fuck.”

Ranboo settled onto the side of the pool, hastily patting himself. “I’m dry?” He whispered. He blanched as a roar of rage came from the distance. “Uh. We’ll talk about this later. Run now.”

“Fine.” Tommy said. He didn’t really want to but Prime knows if he wanted to see how Clay felt about them being at the party after this. He grabbed Ranboo’s hand, bolting out of the yard and didn’t stop running until he hit the street corner.

He would have gone farther but Ranboo had turned into a panting, sweating mess who started wheezing. “You’re so weak.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes.

“Shut up.” Ranboo said wheezing. They walked, well, Ranboo staggered in quiet for a few minutes. Tommy admired the lovely sky above them. “What was that back there?”

“What was what?”

“The- you’re normally not so tense? I mean, I don’t know you well, but you’ve been kind of weird towards Tubbo and you were really angry at the pool party and you were going to jump into a pool to reveal your secret.” Ranboo said quietly. “That doesn’t seem like you.”

“It’s none of your business.” Tommy snapped. But it doesn’t last long before he cracks. He’s never gone this long before spilling to Tubso before. “I just- I don’t know what to do. I saw something weird in the goddamn ocean and now I’m a fish person and I can’t talk to Tubbo because Tubbo is stressed and I’m pretty sure-“

“Pretty sure, what?” Ranboo prompted. He shrugged at Tommy’s annoyed glare. “Not much I can do to hurt you, right? We’re in this together. Maybe it’ll make you feel better.”

Tommy sighed, an odd whistle to his breath. “I think he wants to get rid of it but I enjoy it.”

It was so... freeing down there in the water. There was no foster system, no cruel parents, no bullies. Just him and the current. He had never felt so connected to Tubbo before, like it really didn’t matter that they weren’t blood brothers because they were something more. Something better.

And he knew Tubbo didn’t like it. He had seen the Google searches, saw how Tubbo had stayed up late at night. He only ever did that when he was stressed about something.

“I- pardon me for saying it but I don’t think Tubbo hates this? I’m pretty sure he’d be open to keeping it if you talk about him. But if you don’t talk, you’re just going to work yourself up more.”

“Maybe.” Tommy huffed. “You know, it’s still weird.”

“Yeah?”

“This whole-“

His sentence was cut off as Ranboo’s hand tightened on his arm. Ranboo had stiffened up, looking across the street. Tommy followed his gaze, frowning.

There was another teen across the street who was looking at them. It was too dark to make him out fully, but he couldn’t miss the shock of bright ginger curls. Tommy flipped him off but he didn’t stop watching. The teeth started walking towards him and Tommy cursed as Ranboo tugged him into another sprint.

“Where the fuck are we going? Who the fuck is that?” Tommy yelled as he was dragged down an alleyway and through another.

“No one important.” Ranboo said, mercifully slowing into a jog. He hunched his shoulders in. “Nobody important at all.”

Tommy frowned. “What do I need to talk about my feelings but you can’t talk about yours? That seems pretty unfair to me.”

“Tommy, please.”

“I’ll be merciful this once.” Tommy said. But he committed the dude’s face, what he saw, to memory.

Because he looked like he really wanted to talk to them.

“I’m going to kill him.” Tubbo said conversationally. It would be easy to. He had thought about it plenty of time before.

“I can tell. You talked about it on the boat ride. And the walk to the cave. And then on the walk through the tunnel.” Purpled drawled back. “Tell me something I don’t know and I’ll be properly surprised.

“I just feel like it’s good to be clear.” Tubbo said. After all, he’d probably steal Dogchamp to deal with the bodies. Couldn’t let it get traced back to him after all.

Purpled sighed, stopping in front of him. “I didn’t sign up for bitchiness today.” He said. “And I’m not your therapist. But what’s taking your normal level of creepy probably haunted weirdo doll straight up to psycho.”

“Hurtful but descriptive.” Tubbo said, tugging at one of his curls. “Why aren’t you worried? Tommy could get exposed.”

“Because I wouldn’t hesitate for a moment to throw you guys under the bus and claim I don’t know you.” Purpled said, shaking his head. He slipped his hands back into the pocket of his hoodie. “Look, forget it, let’s just get to the cave.

Suspicious. Tubbo eyed him as they walked, wondering if he could push it, just a little.

“So-“

“Oh, look. There’s the pool. I was paid to take you here so check out what you want to see. I have some fishing to do and I’m not staying here all night.” Purpled said. Someone was definitely feeling a bit touchy right now. Weird. Purpled usually had the ‘I don’t care about anything’ vibe going on.

But they were at the pool so he’d leave it for now. Tubbo shrugged, walking past him and down the rocky bank, looking at the water. Looked like... water. Perfectly normal water. H2O.

“Are you just fucking staring at the water?” Purpled said incredulously. Tubbo threw up his hands.

“Last I checked, the internet doesn’t have wikihow’s on dealing with magical pools. And trust me, I looked.” Tubbo hissed. He walked closer, looking at the pool. Nothing. No odd shimmer in the air. None of the most that had appeared when the full moon came into view. It just looked like a normal pool. “Maybe this was pointless after all.”

“There’s something in the water.” Purpled said. When Tubbo stared at him, he pointed at the very deepest part of the pool. “There.”

Tubbo followed his gaze, eyes widening when he saw something flashing in the moonlight. “You’re right.” He said, stepping closer. He hesitated when he looked down to find himself inches from the water.

“Are you going in or not?” Purpled said, still by the cave entrance. “I’m not going to wait all night.”

“I know, I just-“ Tubbo stared at the water, not quite sure what to say.

“It didn’t hurt, if that’s what you’re wondering. The stupid thing.” Purpled said. Tubbo shook his head.

“No, it’s not that, it’s just-“ He took a deep shuddering breath, curling in on himself. “What if I don’t transform? What if I’m just plain old human Tubbo still?”

There. It was out. What if he didn’t? What if this drives a wedge between him and Tommy? This was magic, it wasn’t guaranteed everyone got the same results.

“What the fuck ever.” Purpled said. He stormed past Tubbo, disappearing into the water. Tubbo caught a flicker of light before the now more familiar shape of Purpled’s fins. A moment, and a hand shot out of the water, tossing something toward him.

Tubbo caught it out of reflex, looking down. It was some kind of old locket. The golden chain hadn’t been rusted by the water or weighed down with algae. In fact, it could have been dropped in just moments before.

What a unique pendant, he thought with a hum. It was a pinkish kind of stone, carved to look like scales overlapping. Peach? Coral? Salmon? He pried at the clasp, annoyed to see it didn’t open.

“There. Found.” Purpled said with a huff, dragging himself out of the water. He hissed when Tubbo drew close to him, reaching out to help. “Back off.”

“What’s up with you? You said I’ve been acting weird but you’ve been acting off all day.” Tubbo said, inching a bit closer.

“Back off.”

“Is it the fish person thing? Because I promise that’s only a little weird-“

Tubbo jumped as Purpled’s tail smacked the ground. “I’m sick and tired of this.” He yelled. “Of this stupid transformation and the way it messes with my head!”

“Your head?” Tubbo whispered, almost too uncertain to ask. He bit down on his bottom lip so hard he could taste blood.

“I don’t fucking know you guys. You’re just the people who sit at my desk and sometimes pay me. And that’s all we’ll ever be and no creepy fish brain is going to say otherwise.” Purpled said, glaring. “You’re just a payday to me.”

Tubbo hesitated, watching as Purpled turned away before sitting on the ground. He knew the moment Purpled said it what he was referring to. And it kind of creeped him out too.

It felt like he had known Purpled and Ranboo for years. Like they were people he needed to protect, guard. A bone deep familiarity that had taken months to build when he first met Tommy.

And it was terrifying because he didn’t know them. If it hadn’t been for the fish person transformation, he was pretty sure they would have never talked again.

But now he sat there, feeling like his world would tear apart if they left him. If Tommy left him.

“We don’t have to be just a payday.” Tubbo whispered. Purpled don’t answer him.

He looked down at the pendant, and wondered if there was a wiki how for this.

Chapter End Notes

Not too much dark Mer in this chapter but a healthy helping of allium duo and Tubbo and Purpled! Do Tubbo and Purpled have a name? They should.

Also yes, it does amuse me that the pool party chapter did not have a pool party and this one did.

Something Fishy

Chapter Notes

Ranboo May not have a backbone but he's currently the emotional backbone of this team

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo had to admit, after a week of Tommy avoiding him, even his insecurities were starting to wear thin.

They weren't gone, no, Tubbo could never be that lucky. They whispered in the corner of his mind, telling him that Tommy was pulling away because he wasn't worth it, because the other didn't love him. That this new... development was the final straw to their friendship.

He ruthlessly shoved it into a little ball and pretended that if he couldn't see it, it wasn't there. Tommy just wanted time. That was cool. It didn't matter that this was the longest they had gone without spending time with each other. He didn't mind. Tubbo was a Reasonable Friend, who didn't get angry that his best friend needed a little time on his own.

The lie was so bad, it even made him wince.

But could he be blamed? Tommy wasn't sharing a bed with him anymore. He wasn't even looking at him when they were sitting at their desks. He even woke up earlier to walk to school before Tubbo was up! Blasphemy.

Tubbo wasn't sure he could take another week of Ranboo practically hiding under his desk and Purpled pretending to sleep through every class. The necklace was a dead end too. He had searched the internet but nobody had a necklace like the one he and Purpled found in the pool. The closest he found was some kind of stupid little touristy pink necklace that said it was made from a real fish scale but it didn't have the delicate etching of scales.

So, in classic Tubbo fashion, he tried to pretend like it wasn't happening and tried to distract himself.

"Get down." Tubbo said, yanking Ranboo into the bush. The other spluttered, but obeyed, shrinking into the bush. It didn't work very well. A suit and tie was not hiding in the bush appropriate. Tubbo shook his head in disappointment.

"What am I doing here?" Ranboo said after a long moment. He shrugged at Tubbo's look. "You just kind of pulled me in here. More information would be appreciated."

"We're spying." Tubbo said archly, gesturing. Down the hillside in front of them, the Main Street was laid bare. Tourists and locals flocked along it, most heading towards the

boardwalk or to the shops.

“Okay.” Ranboo said, letting the moment linger before continuing, more panicked. “Why? Did somebody do something? Did Purpled get seen? Did I get seen?”

“What? No, when would you have the chance to transform?” Tubbo asked, confused. Ranboo avoided his gaze. Suspicious. He hadn’t heard about anything going on at the party but by now, he wouldn’t be surprised if something had. He made a note to wring Ranboo’s secrets out of him soon.

“Just trying it out.” Ranboo blurted out. “Does Tommy know that you’re doing this?”

Tubbo sniffed, pushing his curls out of his eyes. “No.” He admitted. “I wasn’t going to invite you either but then I saw you walking by and thought, ‘hey he looks like he has nothing to do’.”

And as much as he hated to admit it, he felt strangely... on edge without one of the other three around him now. Nothing crippling but noticeable. He had tried testing it a little and found it grew worse over time. A building anxiety and a sense of doom.

Google told him that he was having a heart attack. It was probably lying? Hopefully.

He had noticed the same thing beginning to happen with the others, at least if he was gauging them right. Tommy got jittery in the way that made him get loud. Ranboo hid. Purpled...

The sound of the outburst still lingered in his head. Purpled was snippier than usual, ignored them, but even he stuck with the group. At least at school. He had no idea how the other was keeping so sane, Ranboo looked like he was about to bolt every time he walked into the classroom.

“I had homework.” Ranboo said, interrupting his thoughts. Tubbo raised an eyebrow. Ranboo sighed. “What do you want out of this anyways?”

“I’m checking for important signs.” Tubbo said archly. He sighed at Ranboo’s look of incomprehension. “People in black suits, lab coats, I mean, not at all as obvious as that but suspicious activity. Signs that things are not what they seem, you get me boss man?”

“Are they?” Ranboo prompted, doubtfully looking at Main Street. “The most suspicious thing is that that souvenir shop is closed again but I honestly think Quackity just hates waking up early and dealing with tourists. If it wasn’t for the fact people come in droves to buy his seashells and knickknacks, he’d probably have shut down. Or faked his death. He seems like the type?”

Tubbo filed that tidbit away. “Well, if they are, I’ll see it.” He said. “Right now, that tourist family over there is having an argument over buying a ship in a bottle. And I’m pretty sure that girl is going to break up with her boyfriend because he’s cheating during the chess games they like to play.”

Ranboo looked like he was having a revelation. “Are you people watching?” He said. “Are you so bored you’re actually people watching?”

Tubbo reared back in offense, glaring at Ranboo. “I’m not people watching!” He said. That was pointless tourist stuff. “I’m keeping us safe.”

Ranboo glanced between him and the street. “Looks like just people watching?” He said. He flinched under Tubbo’s increased glare. “That’s not a bad thing.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes. “The mom in that family works in the local marine facility and they just moved here.” He snapped. “The girl and her boyfriend are related to politicians and are here on vacation. It’s not people watching if they could be dangerous.”

He was doing something. Protecting his friends. Even if it didn’t feel like he was sometimes. The bush was quiet for a long moment.

“I’m sorry.” Ranboo said. “I should have- you don’t really take many breaks, do you?”

“I do.” Tubbo said. Tommy and him traded off on who kept an eye out. “I’m not on all the time, boss man.”

“You could be at the beach, or well, not the beach. Or the pool. But I think we have mini golf?” Ranboo pointed out. He shrugged, making the bush shift slightly. “But you’re here keeping an eye on things to make sure we’re safe.”

“It’s not a big deal.” Tubbo said, shifting slightly. A little uncomfortable with where this conversation was going.

It was normal, to do this, at least to him. Keeping an eye out was a carefully honed skill throughout his childhood. Keeping an eye out could be the difference between an okay home and a nightmare home.

So, once he started he just... never really stopped. He liked giving people fanciful backstories sometimes or pretending he was a spy. But that didn’t change it from its original purpose, to make sure that no one was going to hurt them.

And if they would, he’d see it coming.

But now that he had said it out loud, it kind of sounded weird. Like the kind of thing Tubbo could get teased for as another weird foster kid thing. Tubbo forced himself to shrug, flippantly shaking his head.

“It’s more important now.” He mumbled, staring at the crowd. “Someone could have seen.”

They probably hadn’t but that didn’t soothe the nagging anxiety of what if somebody had seen? If there was someone in the marina who had seen them pull Purpled into the boat. Tubbo refused to allow them to be hurt.

“You still need to take a break sometimes.” Ranboo argued. “I dunno man, I doubt a bunch of government people are going to show up and start talking into their watches.”

“I’m not that tired.” Tubbo defended.

“I think your eye bags are even bigger than the largest bag in my mom’s collection.” Ranboo dead panned. Okay, rich boy. Tubbo could see how this was going to go.

“I had to swear off caffeine.” Tubbo said. Ranboo made an understanding hum. Practically a saint, Tubbo was still filled with seething fury everytime he thought about it.

Caffeine was his lifeblood! Something he had cherished and sorely needed for his research binges. But as the day went by, the less able he was to tolerate it. He went from dodging Tommy in order to drink multiple cups to struggling through one mouthful. The taste was bitter and acrid in his mouth.

And it wasn’t so much the taste, which he could have fixed with milk or sugar even if that was blasphemy. It was the way the caffeine made his hands shake and his heart try to break through his ribs to sprint down the road. Even Tommy had to switch to caffeine free coke and nearly mutinied about it.

“I’m off tea too.” Ranboo said softly with a wince. “But even I can tell you’re exhausted and it goes beyond that.”

Tommy stared at the street below them. The weight on his shoulders felt so heavy all of the sudden. Maybe it was the new instincts or the Tommy withdrawal but it slipped out deceptively easily. “Tommy’s not talking to me.”

“I noticed.” Ranboo said, somehow tactfully not saying that he had been waiting for that particular powder keg to blow for a week.

“He’s talked to you and not me.” Tubbo said. That got Ranboo to startle. “Don’t try to hide it. I know how Tommy is like when he has to talk about his problems. And I saw it when I came back from the island.”

Ranboo let out a deep sigh, starting to fiddle with one of the branches by his hands. “It’s not that he doesn’t want to talk to you.” He started before completely giving up on that avenue. Tubbo snorted.

“Tommy doesn’t talk to me when he’s mad.” Or scared, Tubbo thought. And he wasn’t sure what scared him more. Which was the more desirable outcome.

It had always seemed so fixable before. Get Tommy’s stuffed cow away from the bully foster siblings who had taken it. Drag Tommy onto the streets until their agent found them so Tommy didn’t have to worry about being punished for misbehavior again.

But Tubbo didn’t know how to fix this. He didn’t even know where to start. So many things could be wrong and he was worried that one step would break something.

“He’s not mad.” Ranboo said. Tubbo winced. “At least, I don’t think so?”

“That’s worse.” Tubbo said. Because he had even less of an idea on how to fix scared. Or worse, apathetic. He didn’t know what he’d do with himself if Tommy didn’t care about him.

“He loves you, man. He really does.” Ranboo said softly. “And maybe you should talk to him about it instead of sulking and kidnapping people and waiting for him to get jealous enough to come to you.”

“That obvious?”

“This bush has the worst view of Main Street but it’s right by the path I take to get home.” Ranboo said with a shrug. “And honestly, could work, man. I’m just not eager to be in the middle of that.”

“He wouldn’t hurt you.” Tubbo snapped, hands tightening on the fabric of his green shirt. Tommy would never. Snap maybe, but insults were practically his love language.

“He wouldn’t. He told me he wasn’t.” Ranboo agreed, sunglasses meeting his gaze. Tubbo immediately looked away. “But you guys should talk instead of throwing things at the problem until it sticks.”

“Ugh.” Tubbo mumbled, turning back to the street. He liked throwing things at problems until they stuck. Especially when it meant not having to unveil his insecurities to Tommy.

Logically, he knew Tommy wouldn’t care about that. Tommy would never care about that. But still, the worries lingered.

“Can I hug you?” Ranboo asked, hesitating. Tubbo hesitated for only a moment before he pressed into the offered hug, melting at the contact.

It felt good. Right. Something in his chest settled at the contact and Tubbo didn’t have to be a genius to notice how Ranboo melted, slumping into the hug. Tubbo took a deep breath, holding him tight.

It felt like far too soon when Ranboo finally shifted away. “You good?” He asked. Tubbo avoided his eyes, nodding slightly as he looked back at the street below. “You want to go down? We could get ice cream.”

“Can we still even eat ice cream?” Tubbo said skeptically. It was a toss up day to day as to what foods didn’t make them sick. Most days, they went down to the restaurant Purpled recommended for lunch because the cafeteria was a nightmare.

“We could find fish ice cream?” Ranboo said before immediately grimacing when he realized what he said. Tubbo beamed, patting him on the shoulder.

“I’m going to hold you to that, big man.” He said. “Fish ice cream. I want to see your face when you eat it.”

“Please forget I said that.” Ranboo said, awkwardly inching back before standing up. He brushed the leaves off his coat as Tubbo started bouncing down the hill towards the street.

If anyone saw something weird with two teenagers leaving a bush and walking onto the street, they definitely didn't show it. Tubbo put his hands in his pockets, wrinkling his nose as they hit the crowd. There were so many people here and an acrid scent filled the air. Once they left the more open area, souvenir shops crowded the street.

The only open path was the trolley path. "They put that in two years ago." Ranboo whispered in his ear. "But if anyone asks, the locals say it's been here since trolleys were invented. It's certainly a hunk of junk like one."

"Bizarre. I like it." Tubbo said. He pushed his way down the street, glancing around. They had visited the Main Street once but Clem refused to come back again, saying it was really only a place for tourists to visit.

The ice cream parlor was a bust. Ranboo had bought a small vanilla cone but neither of them could stomach it. Tubbo was sulking back down the street when he looked up, hearing the trolley whistle. He watched it chug speedily down the street, nearing them.

It happened in a moment.

A kid just a bit older than a toddler, still all stubby legs and tiny hands, dropped their plush chicken. Without even looking around, the kid stumbled forward to grab it.

Right onto the trolley tracks with the trolley barreling down with no sign of stopping.

Tubbo side checked the unnoticed person in front of him out of the way, diving forward. He curled into a roll as soon as he had one arm wrapped around, taking the impact of the ground and trying to get the kid off the tracks.

Well, he got the kid off, pressing them to his chest as he fell on the other side of the tracks. But with the slow sense of dawning horror that literally comes when you see a trolley barreling towards your legs, Tubbo watched a trolley barrel towards his legs, trying to scramble back even as the dim logic center of his brain told him there was no way he'd get back in time.

His eyes flickered up, meeting Ranboo's shades.

There was an odd squealing sound and Tubbo jerked as the trolley stopped just inches away from his legs. Tubbo stared at it but the wheels didn't inch any closer and he felt himself slumping to the ground, ignoring the babbling crowd surrounding him.

"That was lucky." Someone said, ginger curls bouncing as they shook their head. Tubbo hummed agreement, not saying anything. It wasn't. It wasn't possible for the trolley to stop that quickly.

Something had stopped it and he wasn't sure why. Or how. Tubbo frowned, seeing something flint on the wheels but before he could look closer, the kid moved, curling up on top of him.

"You're a troublemaker, aren't you?" He told the wide eyed kid sitting on his chest. Cute kid, in his less than expert opinion. The only thing separating him from other adorable toddlers he

had seen was the large scar slashed through one eye, making it a murky white. Honestly? Absolutely adorable. 10/10.

“Hi.” They whispered. Tubbo melted a little bit more. They had the cutest lisp.

“Tubbo!” He looked up, watching Ranboo shove his way through the crowd. He kneeled in front of him. “Are you okay?”

“I nearly got ran over by a trolley, what part of that says I’m okay?” Tubbo said. He laughed at Ranboo’s look of horror, sitting up. “I’m fine. It was close but something stopped it.”

Ranboo shuffled. “Yup! Really lucky.” Tubbo narrowed his eyes. Was Ranboo hiding something?

“Boo-“

“Hey kid, why not get some ice cream?” Ranboo interrupted, pressing his cone towards the kid. The kid eagerly accepted it, wrapping both hands around the cone to eat it. Tubbo made an incoherent noise of joy at the sight,

“Michael!”

Tubbo looked up as someone scooped the kid of his chest. His mom, he vaguely remembered her from the stakeout as one of the local fishing families, looked down at him and flushed red. “Thank you.” She said before turning and bolting in the other direction through the crowd.

Michael waved goodbye. Tubbo and Ranboo waved back. “Keep a better eye on your kid!” Tubbo yelled after her. He snorted, letting Ranboo help him up and ignoring the crowd around him as he started pushing his way out. “Stupid.”

“At least the kid will be fine.” Ranboo said, grabbing onto his hand. Tubbo let him, using the extra leverage to break into the other side of the crowd and bolt into an alley.

“He’ll be okay. I know that family, I can try to check on him in the future.” Ranboo offered. Tubbo nodded.

“I’ll come with you.” He said. It would be nice getting to see Michael again. He could teach him to commit chaos.

“On one condition.” Ranboo said, looking back at him. Tubbo folded his arms. Ranboo wanted to add a condition to this? “Talk to Tommy. I won’t bring you if you don’t talk to Tommy.”

Tubbo took a deep breath. Part of him wanted to say no just to be contrary. But there was another, more reasonable part that pointed out how much he missed Tommy. How much it stung that the other was avoiding him.

Maybe it was time to talk to Tommy.

“I will.”

They met at dawn.

It was the only way Tubbo could be certain Tommy would follow him. He had slipped out of the room in the hour just before the sun broke over the horizon, walking down to the empty beach. Seagulls swooped low over the beach and in the distance he could see a ripple of what could be the fin of a dolphin.

He shivered, wishing he had brought a jacket. His seat was comfortable enough, just out of the area the tide reached. The pajamas were probably trash but it was nice.

It would probably be warmer in the sun but the spot he picked, half in the overhang of one of the cliffs, was more private. Better for the talk he was hoping to have.

Tubbo didn't have to wait long before he heard the shuffle of footsteps behind him. “Sorry for waking you up so early.” He said.

“What the fuck.” Was Tommy's eloquent answer as he flopped down on the beach next to him. “Why?”

“We need to talk.” Tubbo snatched Tommy's hand before the other could leap back up, holding him tight. “Please. I'm calling a foster meeting. I can't have you keep avoiding me like this. I can't take this anymore.”

Tommy let out a low shuddery breath, curling in on himself slightly. “It's not that big of a deal.” He whispered. Tubbo shook his head. “I haven't been avoiding you that much.”

“You don't talk to me anymore. You walk to school early without me. You've been hiding things.” Tubbo said. He stopped, scrunching up his face as he thought how to phrase this. “I'm not mad.”

“You're not? Thought you would be, Big T. You hate it when I lie to you.”

“No.” Tubbo said quietly. “This- the last few days? Have been a lot. And I know we've never had to deal with this before. And it's scary going through the dark alone because none of the plans we had before can help here. And I'm scared too. And if you don't want to tell me things, that's okay.”

“I'm doing fine.” Tommy insisted. “No, really, fish fear me-“

“Tommy.”

He went quiet.

“Why do you keep avoiding me? I don't- I don't care why you want to. I just want to know.”

Only the cries of the birds broke the silence. After a long moment, Tommy scrunched into a little ball. “You hate me.” He whispered.

“Oh.” Tubbo said. And then with more feeling. “Oh. Oh, I could never hate you. Why would you even think that?”

He leaned over, wrapping Tommy up in a tight hug, trying to express his conviction through touch. There was no way he could hate Tommy. Be angry, maybe. Be vengeful, definitely. But hate? He couldn't do it. He didn't even think he was capable of it. Tommy was the center of his world, as silly as that might sound. The one constant in his life through every move, the one person who had never left him behind.

“You just- I don't fucking know.” Tommy whispered into his shoulder. “You don't like the mer thing and I can tell! You scribble in your journal about all the little experiments you've been doing and you've been looking up stuff to get rid of it and I thought- I like being a mer so far! It's cool and it's unique and I want to swim but you hate it so much and it feels like you hate me because of it.”

Tubbo took a deep breath, squeezing his eyes shut. “It can seem like that, I guess.” He said. “I don't hate it.”

“Then why do you act like you do?” Tommy said, and there was the burning fury. The need to hide what made him sad. “Why fucking pretend.”

“Because it scares me.” Tubbo hissed. “Because I want to protect you but I don't know how to protect this and there's nothing online. And I'm scared that one day someone will see and you could get killed. Because I want to help but there's this burning desire in my chest that just wants to hide away from the world with you and the rest and I can't.”

“I don't believe you.” Tubbo kind of expected that answer. Most of their heartfelt conversations turned into arguments.

Tubbo took a deep breath and shoved him in the water. Tommy squawked, flopping back into the surf. It took only moments for the scales to appear. Before he could move, Tubbo was dragging him back by the arm he had been holding, pressing his forehead to Tommy's.

“If you want this, that's okay.” He said. “I can work with that. It's me and you against the world and I will never ever leave you.”

“The monster was another fish person.” Tommy said, eyes challenging. Tubbo floundered. Yeah, not going to touch that.

“I can fight him.” He whispered. The monster who ripped a shark in half? Yeah. That was- they'd figure it out. “Maybe.”

“Ranboo turned into a mer at the pool party.”

“Knew he was hiding something.” Tubbo said, satisfied with his conclusion. “But no, try again. I'm still not mad and I still love you.”

Tommy stared back with wide blue eyes. “Turning me into a fish person is a weird way to show that.” He said. Tubbo snorted.

“Had to show you somehow.” He said, leaning back. Tubbo flushed a bit. “Though we’re going to need to wait for it to dry again.”

“Oh.” Tommy looked a bit embarrassed. “That’s actually the third thing. Check this shit out.”

He waved a hand and Tubbo watched with wide eyes as steam hissed away from Tommy’s skin, the change beginning as soon as all the water was gone. “I’m fucking magic now, bitch.”

“When I said we should break laws, I didn’t mean laws of reality.” Tubbo said, wide eyed. “That’s sick. And so useful!”

“I know, right? I’m the coolest.” Tommy said, preening under Tubbo’s attention. Tubbo smiled, standing again and reaching out a hand. Tommy didn’t hesitate for a moment before he took it.

They walked back up the beach, hand and hand as dawn broke behind them. Never turning back to see the alleged dolphin disappear into the wave or the seagulls turn, heading off on a new course of their own design.

“Line’s out.” Purpled said, leaning on the side of Dogchamp and surveying his work with satisfaction. They’d be bringing in a nice haul today.

“See? I told you this was the best fishing spot for miles around.” A warm hand landed on his shoulder and Purpled scowled, but didn’t push it away. Whatever. He rolled his eyes.

“I believe you when I see it, Punz.” He said, staring down at the water. “If it isn’t, I’m kicking you off my boat.”

The promise of a good fishing spot was the only reason he had decided to let the other on. They had met just a few days ago and Punz had sworn he knew the best fishing spot in the region. Maybe it was a little foolish but he had promised and Purpled had-

It’s whatever. He pushed back when Punz’s hand got a bit too heavy, nearly pushing him over the side. “Careful. I’m not washing my hoodie for this.”

“It’d be funny.” Punz said, shaking his head but he turned back to his own line. Purpled sighed, looking away. It wouldn’t be. And it definitely wouldn’t be if Punz caught sight of what he was hiding.

It was fine. This was fine. Purpled grimaced as Punz rocked the boat again. This better be a good fishing spot or he’d be pushing him overboard himself.

Look. I had to bring in Michael. I had to. He's a delight. Lots of softness because things are going to be heating up soon.

Also, Purpled made a friend! How nice.

Young Love

Chapter Notes

I'm baaaack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

There was a soft clatter of kitchen utensils as Clem finished plating her omelet before joining them at the table. Tubbo didn't look up from his tuna, still leaning into Tommy's side.

The morning had been strangely long. It had taken them far too long to walk back to their foster house, their pace slow and strangely solemn. Something raw had opened up between them, festering hurt stripped out and laid bare.

It had happened before but it didn't mean it still stung in a strange way. A sting that made him and Tommy lean into each other and hold on like the world would crash in on them if they let go. They had stopped at the porch, neither certain what came next.

There was no school that morning. Had it been like any other morning, he and Tommy would likely still be asleep, tucked in warm and cozy. The ocean was out of the picture right now. Purpled and Ranboo were friends but Tubbo wasn't sure if they were 'ambush at four am' friends.

Yet, at least.

At least they got to watch the sun slowly rise, choosing easier topics to talk about. Like nukes and the Queen.

For what it was worth, Clem hadn't missed a beat when she had come down stairs to find the two still sitting on the front porch, trailing damp sand and smelling like seawater. She also hadn't blinked when the two had decided to eat some tuna for breakfast instead of her omelets.

Instead she had shooed them back onto the porch to dust off as much off the sand as possible. As soon as they were clean and in drier clothes, she cracked open two cans of tuna for them and set about making herself breakfast.

Not that the tuna wasn't much better than their off and on sudden genetic hatred of eggs. It was strangely salty and dry, even though logically Tubbo knew it was the same tuna he had easily eaten a week ago.

Fish people instincts were picky as fuck and fish ranked above eggs in whatever pickiness hierarchy they had constructed. Who knew?

It especially sucked because Clem's omelets were actually pretty good. With cheese and ham and green onions, it actually tasted like something instead of being a weird flabby patty thing. He glared at his mouthful of tuna but reluctantly shoveled it in.

Tommy reserved his glaring for a can of Coke, making a face with every mouthful but refusing to stop. Apparently the loss of Coke addiction was starting to hit him hard.

"How's school going?" Clem asked between bites, looking down at their plate. Tubbo shrugged, putting his spoon down.

"Fine." He said. There was no point in bringing up the bullies. They weren't exactly a major problem right now anyways and the last house that they mentioned that, they got labeled as problems for it.

Besides, he kind of wanted the freedom to prank/possible emotionally destroy them and not have strings connecting back to him!

"Haven't failed yet." Tommy mumbled. He was starting to vibrate. Tubbo reached out to take the can away but pulled back when he heard Tommy hiss at him.

That wasn't a fish person thing. Tommy would try and chew his arm off if he tried to take the can away. Tubbo knew when to pick his battles.

"Hm." Clem said. They finished their omelet, putting their plate back in the sink. "Any plans for the weekend?"

Tubbo shifted away from Tommy slightly, not liking how the other was starting to shake him as well. "Not really. We were probably going to just hang out around the island. I heard there's a library here."

He had shaken it out of Ranboo out of class. Right now, it was another possible lead to information about what had happened to him. So far, the internet had been frustratingly blank and he had even risked a plunge into some of the darker sides of the net. Nothing.

If this had happened before, people were keeping a tight lid on it.

But the library might have had something, some hint or reference in the history. After all, how did that pool go from murder pool to mermaid pool?

"I was thinking of going by the farmer's market and wanted to know if you wanted to come." Clem asked. Tubbo frowned.

"This island has farms?" Tommy said, more bluntly. "The fuck? Where do they fit? I've seen farms, you can't fit cows on a little island. They need to be wild and free and have space to gallop and climb."

"I don't think you're describing cows. I think you're describing spiders."

"Fuck no, cows need that too. You're per-pet-uating the problem, Big T. The cows need it. They need it." Tommy said. He chugged the last of what was in his can, staring down at it

with the vaguely confused expression of someone who had never once seen the bottom of a drink due to his incessant need to open cans and chug them immediately before yeeting them, not that Tubbo was bitter about that habit at all.

“Right. Well, it’s not really a farmers market so you’re both right. More of a little festival thing. People bring out fresh seafood for the stands, some people have gardens that they sell produce from, or crafts. A couple people make trips to get stuff from the mainland that can be a pain to get out here.” Clem said. They shrugged, wiping down the counters where some of the egg juice had spilled. “It’s not really a true farmer’s market, I guess, but people thought the name sounded nice so it stuck.”

“I dunno.” Tubbo said doubtfully. Maybe Tommy would like it but he was really hoping to find something about fish people in the library. The market took up valuable time he could spend lurking through the book shelves.

“One of the guys who owns a stand there owns bees and sells the honey they make at the market.”

Tubbo stood up so fast that he flipped the can of tuna. “Wow, I love the farmer’s market! We should go right away, why aren’t we there already?”

Tommy couldn’t even say he was surprised.

Tubbo fluttered over the bee stand, gazing at all the items spread out. They really had fucking everything here. Those bees were some real artisans. Raw honey, pure honey, honeycomb, honey sticks, and even some stuff made from beeswax. And then the crowning glory.

“It’s not that big of a deal.” Tubbo said with a sigh. “I don’t need it.”

“Yes, you do.” Tommy said bluntly, rolling his eyes. He couldn’t believe Big T was trying to pull this on him. Him!

“How do you know?”

“You’re making a high pitch noise under your breath and you’re bear hugging that toy to death.” Tommy said. Tubbo had been a goner as soon as he saw the little plush round bees that the little stand sold. Tubbo flushed red.

“I- look, they even had little perfect antennas and big blue eyes! They’re so cute! They’re round and that maxes out their cuteness even more!” Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Then get it.” He said. And then came the next round of fluttering as Tubbo hesitated, looking between the bee plush and the table.

“I don’t really need one.” He said reluctantly. “And Clem only got us a little bit of money to spend around the farmer’s market. I should put it back so we can spend it somewhere else.”

“Fuck that.” Tommy said, swiping the wallet out of Tubbo’s hand and holding it above his head as he rifled through it, ignoring Tubbo’s swipes to grab it. He pulled the cash Clem gave

them and tossed it on the stand. "One bee plush."

The owner took it with the deadpan calm who had seen this scenario play out far too many times. Real king shit in Tommy's opinion. That's a good man if ever he saw one. Tubbo sulked, but didn't lose his grip on the plush.

"It was fine." Tubbo mumbled. Tommy huffed, leaning slightly on Tubbo.

"We can go back to the house for lunch anyways, that'll be way fucking easier than brawling some Karen for a spot in the lines at the food stall. Henry needs a new friend." Tommy said. He was the calmest. And the coolest. "I'm gonna go scope out the stands over there."

"You're going to the shade because the caffeine is giving you a headache, aren't you." Now it was Tommy's turn to flush red, speedily shaking his head.

"No! Just gotta go meet one of my wives over there! Hot girlfriends always want all of my time." He insisted. The Coke was an absolutely great decision. Perfect one really. He never made bad decisions, not once in his entire life! He had been craving the sweet taste and the bubbles.

It had absolutely no connection to the dull pain throbbing through his head. None. In fact, there wasn't any pain in his head. Why would there be? He was too manly for little things like headaches. They took one look at him and instantly disappeared, knowing they could never touch him.

Those stands over in that nice shady spot out of the bright sun just looked kind of inviting, that was all. He bet there was all sorts of cool stuff there and Tubbo was being a real downer for not wanting to go look over there.

"I told you it was a bad idea. Like I told you two days before that." Tubbo said. Despite that, his tone was soft. "Do we need to go back to the house? We can take the day inside."

"No, it's fine." Tommy mumbled, shoving his hands into his pockets and starting to back up. "Finishing looking at the stand, big man. I'll meet you over there. And if you come back earlier than that, I'll steal your bee plush. I'll know."

Tubbo hissed at him and Tommy forced himself to spin around and walk away. Totally not beelining to a bench that was tucked right under a tree and that had been calling him. Ignoring the angry huff of a rich Karen as he swooped in to take the choice seat.

She sniffed, making a comment about modern Youth before shuffling back in the crowd when Tommy didn't even look at her.

Despite his hopes for a bit of a comfortable spot to kick his feet up while Tubbo and Clem did the hard work, within moments, Tommy could feel the ache starting in the back of his mind.

Tubbo was all alone. There were so many people here. So much noise and light and dangers. And he was all alone. Tommy hunched into himself, pushing himself into the corner of the

bench until he was partially wedged in between the armrest and the back.

This was fine. It was fine. He was absolutely not dealing with some kind of crazy fish brain. Tommy's feet began to dance as he forced himself to keep sitting down.

It was just... so much. And not the headache that he definitely now had. Tommy had been dragged through several malls on several different Black Friday sales, including one memorable one that had nearly become a riot. He lived for the chaos. And yet here, it ached. It itches.

Fuck, he'd even take Ranboo and Purpled right now. We're they okay? He bet Ranboob got into trouble. Purpled definitely had. They seemed like the type to get into trouble.

He caught himself just as he stood up, forcing himself to sit back down with a scowl. He was not going to be manipulated by fish, even if it was technically him as a fish. Ranboo and Purpled could get themselves out of trouble.

...

But what if?

"I don't think I've ever seen someone look quite so pissed about a bench before."

Tommy's head jerked up and he glared at the wrongun who had so rudely interrupted his brilliant thinking. "What the fuck do you want, you posh fuck?" He said.

"I- what the fuck? Posh?" The other said, incredulously. Nearly losing their precarious leaning position against the bench that made it more like a fainting couch than the splintered back of a wooden bench.

Tommy wrinkled his nose. "You look like a hipster." He accused. They even had little gold rim glasses perched on their nose, half hidden by their curly brown hair. Some attempt had been made to tame the curls, a red beanie trying to hold the curl monster back, but it just couldn't be done. The curls were the artful kind, the ones that looked like they took hours to style. Everything about him screamed hipster.

Except the yellow sweater. That look comfy and Tommy stared at it, admittedly plotting to steal it.

"I'm not a fucking hipster, you child." The other said, rolling his eyes. Tommy glared, hands coming up.

"I'm not a fucking chip! I'm a big man!" He snapped. Infuriatingly, the other chuckled harder. "You're a real prick. A hipster one too. That makes it even worse."

"I don't think I can take the insults of a child seriously." Hipster fuck said loftily. "You're like, what, ten?"

"I'm sixteen, dipshit." Tommy said. This guy had to be fucking with him. There's no way he look at Tommy, biggest man ever and the tallest man at all times except for when Ranboo

was around because he was a freak who drank like three gallons of milk everyday, and thought he looked like a child.

Hipster made a face, leaning closer. "Sixteen? You're definitely a child. A little child at that." He said. Tommy made a face, pushing off the bench.

"Fuck off." He snapped. He nearly jumped out of his skin when hipster fuck grabbed his arm, pulling him back to sit. "Don't fucking touch me! I'll bite you! I got rabies or something like that!"

"I think we got off to a bad start." The other said, smiling. "I'm Wilbur."

"I don't give a fuck."

"Don't be like that." The other- Wilbur said.

"God, that really is a hipster name if I ever heard one. Your parents really decided to curse you from birth? Looked at a newborn baby and decided to call it something like Wilbur? No wonder you're a hipster." Tommy said, shaking his head. "You didn't have a choice."

"Then what's your name?" Wilbur said, his golden brown eyes strangely bright in the shade. Tommy felt frozen under his gaze. Pinned down like a little big. "I can't just keep calling you child."

"You don't have to call me anything." Tommy said stubbornly.

"I'll buy you a snack! Children love snacks! And it'll make up for me scaring you earlier."

"I don't want one." Tommy said. His traitor stomach rumbled as if on cue and Tommy flushed, avoiding Wilbur's knowing look. "Actually, I changed my mind, you owe me."

Even if this guy was some sort of weirdo tourist who liked scaring people, it was still a good free food scam. Tommy loved scamming food out of people.

"Then can you tell me your name?" Wilbur said, leaning closer. "I can't exactly buy you food if I don't know your name."

"How the fuck does that work?" Tommy said skeptically. Why did you have to know someone's name to get them food. Wilbur didn't move, looking expectant. Tommy's stomach rumbled again, threatening to unionize with the headache that definitely did not exist. "Fine, fuck you, it's Tommy."

"Nice to meet you, fuck you it's Tommy." Wilbur said. He made a mock sound of dismay when Tommy flailed around, trying to hit him. "Stop it, gremlin!"

"Fuck you! It's just Tommy and you know it!" Tommy snapped, face slowly getting redder.

"Child."

"No!"

“Gremlin child.”

“Fuck off!”

“Little baby gremlin child. Absolutely. Baby. Small.”

Tommy made an incoherent screech, completely missing how Wilbur’s pupils dilated at the sound. “That’s not my name!” He said, lunging over the bench at Wilbur. The fucker toppled back with a startled yelp, slamming to the ground with Tommy on top of him.

Wilbur stared at Tommy as the other tried to wrap his hands around his throat. “If you wanted a hug, you could have just asked for one.” He purred. Tommy nearly threw himself off with the amount of force he used to jump off of Wilbur.

“I’m trying to kill you, not hug you.” Tommy hissed. And it would totally be successful and the bastard would be dead.

“I think someone’s cranky because they’re hungry.” Wilbur said, his voice oddly musical. “I know a good land place to eat. It’ll do for now.”

He pushed himself to his feet but Tommy paused, glancing across the market.

From what he could see through the shifting crowd, Tubbo was still busy at the bee stall, cooing over the model of a hive. He couldn’t see Clem anywhere. What if Tubbo came looking for him if he was gone?

Tubs would freak out. Like a category five freak out. Like a hold every hostage and demand his friend be returned freak out. And the thought kind of gave Tommy the warm fuzzies but also the dread knowledge that he couldn’t just wander off to get food.

“Nah, I’m good.” He decided, pushing himself up and started to crawl back over the top of the bench. Tommy blinked as his awkward slither back into his seat was rudely interrupted.

“Why not?” Wilbur asked. Were his pupils always so big? This man was on drugs. Tommy was pretty sure drugs caused big pupils in people. It’s the drugs eating through their brain or whatever.

“My friend will get worried if I just up and leave, yeah? Can’t just wander off to get food without him.” Tommy said. He frowned. “Well, I guess I could just go over and tell him.”

“That’s not necessary.” Wilbur interjected. He smiled at Tommy’s suspicious look. “He’s busy, isn’t he? That’s why he’s not over here with you. The stall is more interesting to him.”

“...yeah, the man loves his bees?” Tommy said. Why did he feel like he was missing half the conversation here? The way Wilbur said it, you would think Tubbo was choosing to watch paint dry instead of being over here right now. “I mean, sad day for him because it means a bit less Tommy time but we’re hanging out later?”

Wilbur made an odd... whistling sound. It was the only way Tommy could describe it. An eerie whistling that faded off with an odd almost creaky quality. It was a nice sound.

Tommy's shoulders slumped a bit. Mayhew it would be better to stay with Wilbur than be alone in this big crowd.

"He'll be fine." Wilbur said, leaning in. He offered a hand, making another odd whistling sound. "If he notices, you can blame me, okay?"

"...fine." Tommy said, slowly. Hopefully, he'd be back before Tubbo noticed but surely, it wouldn't be a huge deal to go off with Wilbur. Tubbo would like Wilbur, he was strangely certain of it.

Corridor? Barricaded. Headphones? On. Maid dress? Burned.

Ranboo was ready to party.

Or. Well. Read? That was a less sad way of describing it considering all he had done was barricade himself into one of the library sections with a cozy chair and some blankets. It's not like the librarians noticed, he'd been doing this for years.

He could almost feel something strained ease in him when he collapsed into the chair.

Man, he was so jealous Tubbo and Tommy spent so much time together. Ranboo had turned into even more of an insomniac. Last night, he had to barricade himself into his closet with his three cats to feel safe enough to sleep even knowing his door and windows were locked and the security system was armed. His eye bags were Gucci.

Now that the weird food urges we're starting to level out, it was like his body decided to add yet another level of fuckery to this whole thing.

Ranboo leaned back in his makeshift den, letting the soothing sounds of zombie groans and screams fill his ears as he opened the book. He was ready for a long afternoon of absolutely nothing at all.

Maybe, if he was really lucky? He'd get to take a fifteen minute nap.

Ooooo.

Apparently the universe didn't hear his plea, because fifteen minutes later, his brain was sounding alarm bells. Ranboo sat up straight with a frown, ears perking as he heard the thumping of footsteps coming towards him.

He scrambled to get his sunglasses on and turn his tunes off, sinking back into the cushions. Maybe, if he really still, they wouldn't notice him. Yeah. That sounded like a good plan. Just ignore the crooked bookcase.

His worst nightmare: having to talk to people. Tripled by the fact that anyone who saw them do this would think he was weird and then he'd have to explain and aw man, he did not have an explanation for why he liked to do this.

The footsteps paused and for one relieved moment, Ranboo thought he was home free. He slowly began to slither out of the cushion.

Only to freeze as a very familiar head of ginger curls peeked around one of the shelves. "Ranboo, I know you're in there." Fundy said. "You're the only person who does this."

"...no, I'm not." Ranboo said. He awkwardly cleared his throat, scrambling up from his seat and bouncing back and forth. Fundy was in the way of his exit. That was. A problem. Yeah, definitely a problem.

"Ranboo, please." There was a soft thumping noise. "I'm really sorry about what happened."

"Sorry doesn't make it okay, man." Ranboo said, shuffling further into the corner. Maybe he could squeeze out between the bookcase and the wall? He examined it and decided he was skinny enough? Maybe. Definitely feeling determined enough to try.

"I know." Fundy groaned in frustration. "But we need to talk! There's something going on and I think you're involved and if you are, you're in a lot of danger--"

His voice cut off with a surprised yelp as Ranboo squeezed out, bolting down the aisle over. He was a gangly one man running machine. Absolute speed.

He tripped over a bean bag halfway through the classic section.

Ranboo scrambled up, glancing out behind him. Fundy hadn't turned the corner yet but Ranboo knew he wouldn't be far behind. His heart slammed against his chest and he made a tiny nervous warbling noise, glancing around. Hide. He had to hide.

But there was nothing but a few tables, only one being taken. A guy who was sitting with his back to the corner, head down and reading a book of Greek mythology. Completely checked out.

What came next, Ranboo was going to take to his grave because even mentioning it would make him combust in embarrassment. He had no idea why his brain suddenly seized upon the guy being the perfect hiding spot.

But no thoughts, head empty. Ranboo scrambled to his feet, ducking around the guy and scrunching up to hide behind him in the corner. The guy tensed, pink braid nearly smacking him in the face. And Ranboo, running on a few hours of sleep and panic, actually shushed him and scrunched in further.

Footsteps ran by.

Ranboo waited a few more minutes before remembering that he had just rushed some stranger and hid behind them. "I'm so sorry, man." He said, scrambling out. "I- you know- uh- there's no good explanation for this, have a nice day."

"Heh?"

Ranboo tried to vault a table to get away faster, failed, and decided to just awkwardly shuffle to the next nearest exit. Why did his parents let him out of the house? If they loved him, they would have put him in a hamster ball.

Behind him, Techno stared after the random kid who had hidden behind him, pushing his glasses up a bit higher.

It wasn't the same kid. The colors were all wrong for one, the one he had seen in the water was bold, gold and red and white. This kid was more muted, the differences couldn't be missed.

And yet... the urge to go after the kid, grab him by the arm and carefully herd him to a safer den lingered. This place was too open. Not defensible enough.

Maybe this form was getting to him. There was no way some rando Human could activate his protector instincts after all. He forced himself to return to his book, wondering when Wilbur would be coming back from his wandering. He made a note to keep it a secret.

Wilbur would mock him like no tomorrow if he heard a panicked human hiding behind him had actually worked on him. Techno snorted to himself.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you guys enjoyed!

Tubbo gets distracted by bees for five minutes...

Moon Spell

Chapter Notes

The beginning...

It's gonna be a bit darker at this chapter. There will be some threats made towards someone's life. That'll start at "Pesky monkey survival instinct". :)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It took embarrassingly long for Tubbo to realize that Tommy wasn't sitting at the bench anymore.

In his defense, he'd been trying to look at the booth while ignoring the uncomfortable anxiety building in his chest. He'd nearly torn a hole in his new bee without how tight he was holding it, trying to focus on little things like the cutest little bee themed honey bottle.

And then he had turned around, beaming as he looked for Tommy to show him the little pictures of some of the bees from the hive and realized with horror that he wasn't there.

In hindsight, he should probably apologize to the poor guy. Because throwing the pictures across the booth while dead sprinting away was kind of rude? Justified but rude.

And holy cow, he thought it felt bad to be away from one of the others for a bit? It felt twice as bad to actually lose one of them from where they should be. Everything spiked up to ten. He might have run over someone. He vaulted the bench.

No Tommy. Tubbo stared at the bench mutely, mentally screaming. Where could he have gone? Not far, he knew. Tommy had refused to acknowledge it but he had been grimacing in a way that always meant he was in pain.

Did he get kidnapped? Or carted off to the hospital? Tubbo wasn't sure what would be worse. He had no idea how to talk a doctor out of figuring out their inevitably weird biology.

Tommy, his- something the back of his mind whispered. They didn't quite seem sure what Tommy was to him either but it was something important. Something vital.

He couldn't lose Tommy. He couldn't.

Tubbo ran through the farmer's market looking for Tommy. Why didn't he buy one of those tracker bugs? Or build one? It would have made it so much easier!

It was in the second, increasingly panicked circle that Tubbo caught sight of a mop of blond hair. He barreled through the crowd without even a second thought, barely slowing so he

didn't run Tommy over. Instead, he flung himself into the other, Tommy squawking a bit with surprise before welcoming Tubbo's vicious hug.

"Big T!" Tubbo felt himself melt a bit as he pressed himself into Tommy's arms, something in his chest easing. He was safe. He deigned to let Tommy rest his chin on his head, feeling cooperative and not like head butting him for once.

For about five seconds. And then Tubbo gently head butted him. "Where did you go, dumbass?" He said. "I turned around and you weren't there! I thought you were running from the police again!"

Tommy flushed slightly, his eyes sliding to the side. "That was one time and they were bitches anyways." He said. "We both know that I was in the right for that."

"If you die, I'm going to murder you." Tubbo told him gently, with feeling. "Why did you leave the bench? I thought your head hurt."

He was, but Tubbo was never going to let that go.

"My head doesn't hurt! It never hurts. I'm invulnerable." Tommy said, speaking like someone who hadn't just given himself a caffeine headache.

"Whatever." Tubbo said with the huff of someone who knew they were right. "Where did you go? Did you get distracted?"

"Kind of? Some fucker was annoying me so I decided to scam some food off of him." Tommy said with a shrug. He looked up, past Tubbo. "See? That fucker?"

"I told you my name." Someone same, voice bemused. Tubbo turned, nose wrinkling when he saw the other.

"He looks like he just walked out of a hipster magazine." Tubbo opined. Tommy nodded quickly. And weirdly so. His clothes were all crisp and new and perfectly coordinated. Either he was really rich or he bought it straight off a mannequin because there was something eerie about it.

"I know right! And he said he wasn't a hipster!" Tommy said. The new guy scoffed. He was holding two trays of food, Tubbo noted absently. One already partially eaten but one had an ahi tuna salad, the tuna still steaming. It smelled delicious.

"I'm definitely not a hipster." The new guy said. He smiled at Tubbo but there was an unfriendly edge to it. "You must be Tubbo. I'm Wilbur."

"Nice to meet you, Wilbur." Tubbo said, his voice dripping with sarcastic sweetness. He inched between Tommy and Wilbur, noting how Wilbur's smile got a little less friendly. "So, you're the guy Tommy is scamming out of food."

"Is it really scamming when he needs it? Feels more like charity to me." Wilbur said, fake smile just as wide.

Tubbo bristled easily picking up on the insult. Even if he didn't quite understand it. Was Wilbur trying to say he forced Tommy to buy him the bee? Weirdchamp, as Tommy would say.

He took a step back, ready to tell Tommy it was time to get out of here. If he didn't like this guy, Tommy must hate him. The other never hated false weirdos like this.

And yet.

Tommy was smiling.

An easy smile, one he rarely showed outside of people he trusted. "I'm glad you get along." Tommy said, folding his arms. "I'm the best at matchmaking people. They call me the matchmaker."

Tubbo shared twin looks of rare confusion. "Uh." Tubbo said, looking at Wilbur and trying to find a polite way to say he hated him. He came up short. "I don't really like him. He's too much of a hipster for me."

"Oh." And there went that smile, dipping slightly. Tubbo reflexively shrugged, not wanting to dash Tommy's hopes and dreams but failing miserably.

What did he like about this guy? Tubbo had looked at him for two seconds and something in his mind had informed him that his vibes were rancid and he needed to be vibe checked. Preferably out of a window. Tubbo vibrated with the need to bite.

Wilbur scoffed, passing the salad to Tommy who dug in happily. "That's fine, some people tell me I can be... quite a lot." Wilbur said. That was an understatement.

"He likes music a lot." Tommy said. "He said there's a store nearby that sells music and that he can show me it!"

"But." Tubbo said quietly. "I thought we were supposed to go to the library."

It had been kind of half hearted plan but it had been a plan. After the farmer market, they were going to eat and go to the library. And they probably wouldn't get much work done but they would be together.

"Oh." Tommy said, screwing up his face. "Shit, yeah, you're right. I'll have to take a rain check on that, Wilbur."

"I don't know when I'll be in town next but I can try." Wilbur said and Tommy's face fell a little more at that and Tubbo felt himself weaken. Just a little.

He shouldn't. They needed to stick together right now. More than ever because if their secret was discovered, if any little accident happened, foster care would look like a vacation. And more than that, he wanted to spend time with Tommy right now. Half what might be instinctual bull and half what was just love and concern for the other.

It had been too long since he and Tommy spent a full day together, only just patching up their previous fight this morning.

He could veto it, he was nearly sure. Tommy was already starting to shuffle back, half ready to go. He could bring him along.

But didn't he just promise himself to try and calm down a little? He wanted Tommy safe but he didn't want to trap him. Tommy was still his own person, beyond the weird fish person thing.

Tubbo thought Wilbur was kind of a bitch, but Tommy trusted him. And Tommy was smart enough to know who he should and shouldn't trust. He forced himself to relax, reminding himself that this was fine. Definitely fine.

"Go with him to the record store." Tubbo said with a shrug. Tommy paused, looking a little surprised. "All good, big man. You hate libraries anyways and it would probably be better for us not to get kicked out in five minutes."

"I would not!" Tommy said spluttering. "I've never gotten kicked out with a library."

"That sounds like a lie to me." Wilbur said, laughing as Tommy spit curses at him. "The record store it is!"

It was weird how much... nicer? Warmer? The other was towards Tubbo. Like night and day. He looked at Tommy and immediately brightened. But when he looked at Tubbo, suddenly the smile dimmed, almost becoming hostile.

Except he never stopped smiling and Tubbo was starting to question his people reading because?? There wasn't actually any difference but it felt different? Somehow? In a way that was starting to drive him absolutely nuts.

"Are you sure you don't want to come with, Tubbo?" Tommy said, glancing back to him. Tubbo hesitated, meeting his gaze. Not seeing how Wilbur's eyes darkened. "I know records aren't your thing but--"

They weren't. Tubbo had tried, he really did. But this wasn't a trip that was meant for him. Also, he wasn't sure if he could be in Wilbur's presence for five more minutes without punching him.

Something about him looked very punchy.

"It'll be okay." He said with a shrug. "I'll meet you at the pier in two hours?"

Tommy beamed. "I'll beat you there first." He said. Tubbo scoffed.

"You'll be wheezing halfway through if you try to run there." He said, playfully bumping Tommy and dodging out of reach from Tommy. He used that momentum to dart back into the crowd, trying to ignore how his heartbeat suddenly began to speed up. "Have fun! I'll be at the library! Call me if you need me!"

This was fine, he told himself, clutching onto his bee and trying not to think of worst case scenarios. Totally fine. Normal even! Tommy wanted to spend time with other people. They had done this before, heck, Tommy had even gone on sleepovers without him.

Granted, not usually this quickly. But maybe it was the music thing? Tommy had always loved music records.

He's not trying to abandon you, Tubbo told himself. He could have gone with them. He was the one who chose not to. Tommy was going to have a nice trip to the record store with his new friend. He had his phone on him and was the better fighter of the two anyways. It was fine. Tommy made his choice and it made him happy.

But it didn't feel fine.

Tubbo weaved through the crowd, wandering towards the seafood area. He knew, in the back of his mind, what, or well who, he was looking for.

He needed someone or he'd race right back to Tommy and start clinging to him.

He couldn't help the sigh of relief when he saw the familiar violet hoodie hovering around a popular stall. Purpled was carefully unloading fish as another person accepted payment, waving along the customer.

They were unfamiliar as well. Tubbo didn't exactly know everyone but they stood out somehow, in the same odd way as Wilbur. Like something about them was a bit too put together.

Even under the sun, they looked perfectly fine in their white jacket and gold chain swaying around their neck. They leaned against the table, watching him as he approached.

"Looking to buy?" He asked. Purpled glanced up, shaking his head when he saw Tubbo.

"Looking to talk." Tubbo said with a shrug. Purpled huffed, sending the crate down.

"I'm not going back there." He said. "This is business hours and I don't accept requests during business hours."

"Of course not!" Tubbo said. "I didn't come over here to make you drive me there. I came over because we haven't talked in a while and I wanted to check on you."

He didn't think he deserved that skeptical look. Tubbo tried to keep his evil plans to a minimum during weekends.

"I'm doing fine." Purpled said. "Working."

"Do you need any help?" Tubbo asked, looking between him and the heavy crate. He had time, he could help Purpled.

"Not really." Purpled said, the words short and clipped. He cursed as the next crate tipped slightly in his hand, the other person lunging up to catch it. They missed just barely, one hand

accidentally overbalancing the crate, a gentle cascade of ice hitting the ground. “Fuck. I’ll go get more ice.”

“I should go.” The other offered. Tubbo squinted, looking between them. They were both blond, he noted. Though the guy was more of a scruffy darker blond than Purpled. “It’s my fault anyways.”

“No, it’s fine. You’re pulling a better profit anyways, selling the stock.” Purpled said. He nodded at Tubbo, clearly thinking about something. “Talk to you in a bit.”

He couldn’t have sounded less enthusiastic if he tried. Par for the course. Purpled had been bristling since their last trip. Tubbo wasn’t quite sure if it was the fish person thing, or maybe Purpled just didn’t like people.

Tubbo coughed awkwardly, watching Purpled jog back to a pile of communal supplies and ice. “He didn’t tell me he had a brother.” He said. The other guy laughed.

“Purpled doesn’t like to talk about himself.” He said, leaning against the booth. “He’s quiet like that. The name’s Punz.”

“Punz?” Tubbo said, testing the z at the end. “I’d that a nickname?”

“My parents liked odd names.” Punz said with a cool shrug. That could explain why Purpled’s name was odd, though Tubbo couldn’t judge. He was the poster child for the nicknames being better than real names crew. “Nice bee by the way.”

“Oh, thank you! I just got him.” Tubbo said, preening. His child has been complimented! This was a great day. “His name is Spins and I’d die for him.”

“Sounds reasonable.” Punz said. He paused to take money from a customer, easily outmaneuvering their attempts to haggle. “I haven’t heard him talk about you before though.”

“Really?” Tubbo said with a frown. “I would have thought-“

Huh. Weird. He would have expected Purpled to at least complain about him.

“Probably not a big deal and don’t take it personally. He didn’t tell you about me, did he?” Punz said, smirking. Tubbo nodded slowly. Purpled was almost done shoveling ice back into the cooler. “I think it’s good he has a friend. I worry about him.”

“Makes sense. I worry about my brother all the time.”

“You know how it is.” Punz said. He narrowed his eyes, looking at the crowd in front of them. “I’m gonna need to quit talking to you for a while. We’re about to get hit with a rush and I need to focus so no one short changes me.”

“Now, you really do sound like Purpled.” Tubbo mumbled. Money obsession must run in the family or something. He couldn’t quite understand it. Punz chuckled but didn’t dispute it.

He leaned against the table, watching the other haggle people out of their money. It was kind of scary honestly. No one won against Punz. Ever. By the time Purpled's finally carried the crate back over, Punz had filled the cash box most of the way full.

Tubbo straightened, opening his mouth to ask Purpled if he was busy and if he was free to chat. But Punz beat him to it.

"We're having solid sales but I think we'll need to bring in more of the tuna next time." Punz observed, rubbing his chin. "They've been the most popular but we didn't get as many as we should have to take proper advantage of it."

"Fucking knew it. Your fishing spot is shot." Purpled said with a snort as he set the crate down.

"Oh, like yours is any better! We got two crates, I'd wager that's more than your best spot." Punz said skeptically. A greedy gleam flashing in Purpled's eyes.

"Bet." Tubbo glanced between them, feeling a bit awkward.

"Hey-"

"We'll go out after this." Punz said as if he didn't hear Tubbo. "But I left the second crate in the truck, can you go pick it up?"

"Fine, lazy." Purpled said. He tilted his head at Tubbo.

"Soon as possible would be good. The rush is lulling but it's still here!" Punz said, straightening for the next customer. Tubbo sighed as he saw Purpled jog off. Right. Well, luckily, he still had plans.

"I have to head out." He said quietly. Punz didn't give any indication he heard him other than a tilt of his head. Tubbo shrugged, not sure how to answer that.

He jogged after Purpled, wanting to say goodbye himself. Soak up just a few more moments with him to ease the fish brain.

"What?" Purpled said, not slowing his pace for a moment. "Is this really about the island?"

"What? No? I have to head to the library but I didnt want to just up and disappear on you." Tubbo said, confused. Purpled stumbled slightly, dodging away when Tubbo reached out to help him up. "I really don't have any motives other than chatting a bit before I went to the library."

Purpled stared at him for a few moments, violet eyes blank. "Everyone has ulterior motives." He informed him crisply.

"I mean I'm not denying that." Tubbo said, hefting up his new plush friends. "But I don't really have any for you? Other than making sure you're okay?"

Purpled snorted. "Would you still do that if it was for the... situation?"

“If I still got to know you? Probably. I mean, so far, you and Ranboo are the only ones at schools who are relatively cool and not assholes? And you don’t pry or say we’re weird or dumb or that Tommy is too loud which makes for good friend material.” Tubbo said. He paused. “I’d probably feel less like I’m having a heart attack whenever schools ends.”

He leaned slightly closer. “But don’t tell Tommy, he’s enough of a theater kid that he’d probably fake one anyway.”

And funnily enough, he found himself meaning it. It wouldn’t have been so fast or quite as clingy as this, in the beginning at least, if he could see him growing to care for them over time. Folding them into his schemes and concern.

It ultimately came down to how long they would be staying... but yeah. Tubbo could see himself growing attached to them, and for all his protests, Tommy gave his heart away easily.

That got a reaction. Purpled’s eyes flickered away. “You should go to the library.” He said eventually, fishing keys out of his hoodie pocket. “Don’t let me keep you.”

“Okay.” Tubbo said, already feeling his heartbeat beginning to speed again. The words came out slightly faker than he wanted. He turned, starting to push his way back into the market crowd.

“Tell me if you find anything.” Purpled said. Tubbo stumbled, someone jostling past him as he tried to turn around. Purpled was already speed walking away but Tubbo had heard it.

Purpled wanted him to talk to them again!

Tubbo beamed, glancing back at the fish booth. Maybe he should have toldPurpled that his older brother was cool?

He flinched when he meant blue eyes. Punz held his gaze for a moment before turning away. Tubbo felt himself shudder, letting himself ease back into the flow of the crowd. That was weird.

But even as he left the marketplace and got to the library, he still felt watched. No matter how deeply he buried himself into the books.

Someone was hunting him

Tubbo dreamed someone was calling him.

Sweet and eerie, it lingered on the edge of hearing, where dreams met misty consciousness. Drawing him to follow. Distantly, he felt himself push the blankets away, wriggling out of Tommy’s clingy grasp.

They called him, telling him he needed to come forward, to see them, to meet them. He was too far away. Why was he so far away? He needed to be closer.

Spins dropped to the floor but he didn't pause to pick him up, pushing out of the bed and wobbly standing up. The song lilted, telling him that everything was fine, that he needed to follow.

Tommy let out a sleepy mumble, patting the bed where he was. But Tubbo didn't look at him. Slowly, he stumbled out of the room. Dreamlike, Tubbo followed the call of the voice, fumbling with the front door before pushing it open.

It was pitch black and starless. Was he dreaming? He must be. The only light came from the moon but he didn't need it. Somehow, he knew exactly where he needed to go.

Some part of him was screaming at him to stop but it was buried deep down where the rest of his mind was sleeping. Tubbo walked down towards the beach, not noticing how the cold was starting to make him shiver. Pebbles dug into his toes, sending pinpricks of pain with every step.

Still it sang on, pulling him along.

He stepped out onto the beach. Still farther. He needed to get closer to the singing. It was louder here but it wasn't enough.

His feet were beginning to go numb.

Tubbo walked along the beach, drawn to the same innocent little spot where he met with Tommy. They waited for him there. The singer. The one who called him.

At the sight of them, something stirred before quickly being buried.

"There you are." Wilbur sang. It had to be. They had the same warm brown curls, the golden eyes. The smug grin and the way their voice lilted. All of it was the same.

But where human skin was, now scales flourished, elegant fins barely visible under the dancing surf. Wilbur leaned out of the water, propping himself up on one of the rocks. Like Tommy, Tubbo thought distantly. But bigger. He hummed, the same song that called Tubbo here.

Sharp teeth flashed in the moonlight. "Little prey." Wilbur cooed. "You've been such a pain."

Tubbo wheezed as pain flashed across his mind. He had? The song told him he had and that he should regret it.

"Little thief would be better." Tubbo twitched, a little voice whispering that this wasn't safe, that this was dangerous, but then the humming got louder and it disappeared back into the dream. "Stealing him out of the water and using him like a toy."

Who?

"Tommy deserves better." Wilbur said. That's where Tubbo remembered those eyes from. Sharks. The same flat and pitiless gaze. "He'll get better."

“Tommy.” Tubbo whispered. Sighed was more true. Wilbur’s gaze sharpened, tail slapping the water.

“Keep his name out of your mouth.” He hissed. “You don’t deserve it. Pretending like you’re worthy of even being near a precious little pup, like he doesn’t deserve the moon and the stars just for existing.”

This was a weird dream, Tubbo thought. He didn’t like it very much. Because why wouldn’t he give Tommy the moon and the stars if he just asked for them?

“At least you can be useful for once.” Wilbur said with a short. He hummed louder. “Come here.”

Tubbo stepped closer but something made him hesitate, just out of the lapping waves. He didn’t want to go in there. He didn’t know why, but he couldn’t.

“Pesky monkey survival instinct. Come on.” Wilbur said, rolling his eyes. He grinned as Tubbo didn’t even flinch. “Why? It’s not like you can do anything. I could tell you what’s going to happen, describe every last painful moment, and you won’t do much as squeak. Maybe I should.”

Tubbo kind of wanted this dream to stop now. He wanted to wake up back in his warm bed, away from the music. He didn’t like the music as much now.

“I’m going to drown you.” Wilbur said, completely conversationally. “I’m going to drown you for daring to take the little pup away. I haven’t made my mind up yet if they’ll find your body washed up on shore or if you’ll just be another stupid little statistic that never gets found. I’m going to watch the life drain out of your eyes as it is stolen away by the ocean and tomorrow, I’m going to fix what you did to that little pup.”

He couldn’t move, only able to watch as Wilbur reached forward. “Oh, I’ve been waiting for this. Techno told me to wait but as soon as I saw you in the marketplace, I knew I couldn’t.” He said. “I’ll kill you in this very spot just to make a point.”

He didn’t like this dream. The singing wrapped around him, keeping him calm even as the predator neared.

And then a hand wrapped around his ankle and pulled.

It was the cold that hit him first and Tubbo screamed, everything suddenly firing on all cylinders. Wilbur didn’t hesitate, dragging him away from shore and Tubbo was still screaming as he went under, sucking in a mouthful of water.

It burned and Tubbo felt himself hiccup as a strange feeling briefly bloomed through him, coughing so hard he sucked in more water.

It lingered but the burn in his lungs went away and Tubbo’s eyes snapped open. Green, that he saw first. Billowing in the water around him. And Wilbur’s wide, shocked eyes.

“What-“

Tubbo screamed, slashing at Wilbur's face. Thin scratches bloomed across Wilbur's cheek where he touched and the other reacted with a wounded noise, grip tightening. "Wait--"

He didn't want to be here he was scared he wanted to go home why were they hurting him it hurt he was cold and hungry and scared and where were his friends help help help *help-*

There was a sound like a hiss and Wilbur shrieked as something bowled him over. Tubbo's scream cut off abruptly as he was thrown through the water, flailing to keep himself upright. He oriented himself, clumsily trying to flail towards the moon above. He had to get out of the water. It wasn't safe here.

Brown and blue and black were grappling nearby, shrieks and hissed splitting the water. Tubbo flinched back as red began to cloud the water, the back of his mind screaming at him to swim but fuck, he didn't know how.

He screamed again as something slammed into him, arms wrapping around him and tucking him into someone's chest. Tubbo beat against them, hissing and flailing as he tried to drag little claws against their skin.

They let out a sharp hiss, one hand pinning his claws effortlessly.

"Don't you FUCKING dare--" He heard Wilbur yell, oddly muted before being cut off with a hiss. A hiss vibrated through the water around him and Tubbo caught one last glimpse of the moon above him before he was pulled away, unable to see as the other darted through the water.

It had been such a pretty dream at first.

Chapter End Notes

Why Tommy liked Wilbur on sight and Tubbo didn't? Wilbur was putting out 'I'll kill you' vibes, mer style at Tubbo, not knowing that Tubbo could pick up on it while trying to charm Tommy into liking him. It's the mer instincts.

That backfired.

Wilbur, seeing Tommy: a baby??

Wilbur, seeing the kid he's trying to drown turn into a mer: TWO BABIES??

The Denman Affair

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tubbo allowed them to drag him for all of five minutes, giving himself five minutes to have a breakdown.

Maybe a bad idea! But Tubbo would hear no criticism when he was 95% certain he just became a fish person, the guy he met at the farmer's market was a fish person and tried to murder him and he was 72% certain he had just been kidnapped

So, a breakdown was Imminent and it refused to be ignored.

Because holy fuck, he was a fish person! Which! He knew was likely and had seen others become fish people but holy fuck! Part of him hadn't really connected him being a fish person as a real thing!

And he had nearly become fish food! In the cold water, his mind was awake and aware of his imminent doom.

Tubbo had always joked about becoming a kill on sight target, but not to be the skunk in the garden party, *that wasn't supposed to actually happen*.

Wilbur, the same Wilbur he had just trusted with Tommy, had done some freaking magic stuff on him. Because looking back, the entire hour was a blur and completely nonsensical. Why did he get out of bed? Why go to the beach? Why did he stand there and let the hipster preach at him?

Tubbo had nearly died.

If it hadn't been for the murder pool and the fish person thing, he would have. And no one would have known what happened. It was a chilling thought.

No one looked for foster kids. People would have assumed he ran off somewhere or hitched a ride off the island. Maybe it became another ocean statistic. And nobody except maybe Tommy and double maybe Ranboo and Purpled would have looked.

Tubbo made an odd wheezing sound, choosing to shove that thought off into a box in his mind. He couldn't handle it right now.

And worse, Wilbur had wanted Tommy for some reason. If Tubbo had died there, Wilbur would have had free reign.

Tommy...

Tubbo didn't know how Tommy would have reacted to his disappearance but they had promised to stay together forever. And Wilbur hated him enough to kill him for it. His heart

felt like it was beating a mile a minute.

That no good, bottom feeder, soil sucking, hipster trash-

Tubbo was going to murder him. Turn him into fish sticks! Nobody got to try and kill him and get away with it!

But first, he had to get it together first.

Tubbo wheezed, slowly dragging himself back together. Whoever was dragging him was still moving, dragging him along. The breakdown was over.

A very productive breakdown too! Lots of mental screaming, a few inventive swears, and a little anxiety spiral. Really, top quality, one of his best. And then he decided it was time to pull himself back together.

Only one person got to kidnap Tubbo and this person was Not Them.

Tubbo gritted his teeth. His hands were still trapped in one of the stranger's hands, the other pressing them to his chest as they swam, his head tucked under their chin. And swam fast. Now that he was paying attention, the water was moving way faster than it should be, more like sticking his arm out the window of a moving car and not a gentle paddle.

In technicality, he shouldn't be able to do anything.

In reality, Tubbo had a very hard skull and a lot of practice using it. Tommy had long since learned not to get too close.

This stranger didn't know.

With an angry, too inhuman hiss, Tubbo reared back, slamming his head into their chin. They yelped, the water stuttering with their movements. He grinned in victory, slamming his head into their chin again with a pop and then trying to bite. He was going to make them suffer.

He managed to sink his teeth in just before they finally ripped him off, spinning into the water with a victorious yell, muted by the water.

It had been far too long since he had gotten to bite someone! This was great. He awkwardly paddled, trying to get in position to bite again. Or escape.

"Ow, pequeño tesoro, be careful." The stranger scolded.

What the fuck??

They could talk?

Okay yeah, he should have maybe expected that? After all, Wilbur could talk! But Tubbo felt like he couldn't be faulted for not expecting them to talk to him.

Tubbo startled, looking at the stranger with wide eyes. They hissed, checking the bite he left on their shoulder. And then did a double take, shocked by their size.

He knew that they were bigger than him when he grabbed them but he hadn't been expecting the difference to be so freaking huge! Tubbo looked tiny next to him. Like a first grader next to an adult.

This was absolutely abysmal.

As Big T would say, he was going to remove their kneecaps. If fish people had knee caps.

Their coloring was kind of fancy too. Their tail was black, transitioning to a dark blue around their chest, almost bruise like against their tan skin. When they twisted, he could see brilliant blotches of gold against the black and blue, spreading across their fins. Almost like wings. A scar through one eye like someone had taken a knife to their face.

Or, Tubbo thought nervously, claws.

How many fish people were there?

Their frills were smaller, almost more... proportionate? To their size than Tommy's and Purpled's were who looked like they were drowning into their frills.

Like he was too. Tubbo glanced down at himself, barely repressing a wave of panic. The green was far too familiar, the color of his favorite sweater. He couldn't see himself well, but he could see the mossy green scales of his tail, the little flecks of black and yellow around the edge of his fins. Almost like little bees.

The gills, shifting slightly as he breathed. He was certain that if he reached up, he'd feel fins and gills along his head and neck too.

Holy fuck. He was a fish person.

Tubbo forced his gaze back to the other fish person, knowing if he looked any longer, he'd go straight back into a breakdown. And he couldn't afford a breakdown right now.

Right now, he had a bastard to deal with.

They glanced up, catching his eyes. Tubbo bared his teeth. "Back off!" He said, the words oddly muted and bubbly. He swung his tail, clumsily forcing himself backwards.

"Hey, hey, no need for that!" The stranger said, putting their hands up. Tubbo ignored him, looking around.

He couldn't see a single hint of land anywhere. Absolutely nothing. He was surrounded by the ocean on all sides, and underneath him was only the dark black abyss. The kind of scene that usually got scary violin music in nature documentaries.

Well, this was horrifying. He had already failed rule one of street smarts and got taken to a secondary location.

The stranger drifted closer and Tubbo jerked, awkwardly trying to backpedal before remembering he didn't have legs anymore. It was hard swimming with a tail! How had Tommy done it?

"Calm down, you're going to hurt yourself." The stranger said. Tubbo coughed, a strange hiss bubbling up when the stranger reached for him. "Ey, you're a feisty one, aren't you?"

"Who are you?" Tubbo said, snapping at their hand. They pulled back but Tubbo could recognize the greedy glint of someone waiting to grab someone. Usually, it wasn't directed at him.

The stranger's smile was brilliant. Literally. Light flashed off of a sharp golden tooth in their smile. "You can call me Quackity, tesoro." He crooned. "What's your name?"

"Quackity?" Tubbo echoed, ignoring the rest of his question. That sounded strangely familiar. But from where? Where would he have heard that name from? He sorted through his memories, trying to remember.

Wait.

"Like, from the gift shop?" He said skeptically. How likely was it that two people had the exact same weird name? But how was it possible that the fish person in front of him ran a shop too?

"You know of my shop?" Quackity said, perking up. "What do you think? Las Nevadas is quite magnificent by now."

"I've never visited. I heard of it from a friend." Tubbo said, taking a vicious sort of glee in how Quackity dipped slightly. Take that, kidnapper! "Wait, I thought you're a fish person though? How are you leaving the water?"

"It's easy enough, mi pequeño tesoro. A little bit of magia, and presto, a mer can walk on land." Quackity said. "But I'm sure you know that, eh? After all, I'm pretty sure I've seen you walking around on two legs. Can't fool my eyes."

"That's none of your business." Tubbo said stubbornly. He tried to sneakily test his tail, twisting slightly as he moved. It was kind of like trying to dolphin kick from the distant memory he had of swim lessons. Except way more complicated. "What the fuck is a mer?"

"I-" Quackity jerked back, looking honestly shocked. Score one for Tubbo! "You don't know what a mer is?"

"No? Should I?" Tubbo asked. He wasn't exactly up to date on ocean fads or whatever. He wasn't exactly updated on any kind of trends.

Quackity mumbled what sounded suspiciously like swear words in another language. Tubbo took careful note of them. Tommy loved hearing new swears. "What do you think you are?"

"Uh, I think I'm a fish person?" Tubbo said deadpan, not quite sure what else to say. He gestured at the tail. Looked pretty fishy to him. What else was he supposed to say?

“Oh, I’m going to kill those bastardos-“ Quackity mumbled. He glanced up at Tubbo. “The real name for us are Mers. That’s what you are.”

“Oh.” Tubbo said, feeling oddly lost. There was an actual name for this... species? Was that the right word for it? Offshoot of humans?

He just... hadn’t thought there would be? He had been throwing around names like mermaids and fish people but it hadn’t actually occurred to him that there was a real name for him and Tommy and Purpled and Ranboo.

...it hadn’t really occurred to him that there was any others like them either.

Quackity’s eyes darkened and Tubbo stiffened slightly, scrambling for a new topic. The other’s claws were sharp and he didn’t look forward to meeting them. “Why do you keep calling me that? What’s a tesoro?”

“Little Treasure.” Quackity said, some of the tenseness seeping out of his frame. “What else would I call you? You won’t give me your name.”

“I don’t know you.” Tubbo pointed out. “And you just dragged me off into the middle of nowhere.”

He clumsily dodged a head pat, baring his teeth in warning. “Easy, you’ve got some sharp little teeth in there.” Quackity said. “Can’t a guy be curious? After all, why was it that you weren’t in the water?”

“What kind of question is that?” Tubbo said, completely thrown off. Why did that matter?

“You’re very young, aren’t you.” Quackity said, one lazy beat of his tail taking him into Tubbo’s personal space. “So very tiny. You’re what? A decade? Maybe two? I’d wager nowhere near to thirty and I always win my bets.”

“I’m not a kid!” Tubbo snapped. It was infuriating the way Quackity just smiled lazily. He snapped at them but this time, Quackity just laughed.

“Which pod thought it was a good idea to leave you on land?” He said, but it didn’t sound like he was talking to Tubbo. Quackity swam forward and Tubbo backpedaled, trying to keep away so the other couldn’t grab him. “Completely defenseless?”

“I’m not defenseless!”

“If I hadn’t fought Wilbur, he would have killed you.” Tubbo froze, only now hearing the ominous ripple of the water behind him. Too late to save himself as he bumped into someone, hands landing on his shoulders. “You can really scream, can’t you?”

Tubbo shrieked in fear. They were going to eat him, the fish part of his brain insisted. He panicked, trying to twist away and dive.

The hands tightened, pulling him back before he got too far. Tubbo switched tracks, twisting with his teeth bared.

“Oh, fuck no.” The person behind him rumbled. Tubbo yelped as he was gently pushed back with one hand, tilting his head back. “Is the pup teething?”

“No clue. He’s not telling me anything.” Quackity sounded way too amused by this situation. “Maybe you should let him bite you.”

“Very funny.” Tubbo broke from their grip, teeth snapping at their hand. An odd whistling sound slipped out, accompanying their words. “Stop.”

And

Tubbo

Froze

It was the whistle, he knew it somehow. It felt exactly like- like- some sort of reprimand? But deeper than that. Like he wasn’t allowed to ignore it because it meant that he had been very bad and needed to stop right now. He froze, hanging limp in their arms and waiting for punishment.

“There we go, kid. That’s much better, isn’t it?” They said. “Now, what’s your name?”

“Tubbo.” He mumbled before he could stop himself.

“Tubbo? That’s a good name. You can call me Schlatt.” They- Schlatt said, shifting slightly. Tubbo made a fearful hissing sound. “Seriously, what is up with this pup? How bad did you scare him?”

“Ey, don’t blame me! He was like that when I found him. Didn’t even know what Mer were. Whatever pod has him, they’re doing a terrible job.” Quackity was too close, Tubbo knew.

But somehow, horrifyingly, he was having to claw his way out of whatever Schlatt had done to him. The fish part of his brain kept insisting that he needed to stay still but it wasn’t exactly explaining why.

Damn it, Tubbo could use fish google right now!

“Their loss.” Schlatt said. “Pup. I’m going to need you to breathe for me. Can’t have you passing out because you forgot you can breathe water, right?”

“It’ll be easier if you let go of me.” Tubbo said, voice slightly small. It felt like a Herculean task to force out even that. But he needed Schlatt to let go of him.

“Can’t do that, kid.” Crushed in a moment. “You’re shaking like a leaf. Are you even old enough to be out of the nest?”

“The what?” Tubbo paused. “Uh, no? Actually, I should be going back now. They’ll notice I’m gone soon!”

The grip didn't loosen. It had been a poor effort anyways. "Nice try, kid. But you're decades too young to pull the wool over my eyes."

Tubbo gritted his far too sharp teeth. "I do need to get home though." He insisted. "They'll be missing me soon. This was a great conversation, I learned a lot, but you know, I have things to do."

He glanced to the side, noting how close Quackity was. The two were caging him in.

"Why would you do that? We've only just started talking."

The bed frame clattered to the floor. Tommy glared at it, huffing and puffing.

Nothing in the closet, nothing under the bed, not even behind the door! He couldn't find him anywhere! Tommy paced across the floor like a caged tiger, Spins stuffed under one arm as he pulled his phone out of his pocket.

It wouldn't be the first time Tubbo had gone out for a night time walk or some shit like that, something something, less witnesses, something something, best alibi.

But it was the first time in a long time that Tommy didn't have so much as a post it note lovingly stuck to his forehead.

This was wrong. Tubbo never disappeared without telling Tommy or leaving a note behind to explain. And where would he even go without Tommy?

They had already visited a murder island together and swam in a radioactive murder pool, it's not like there was many more extreme options to see on this island that Tubbo would hide from him! And weirdest of all, Tubbo somehow slipped out without waking him up. Tubbo was sneaky, but he wasn't that sneaky.

He didn't even take his phone either. It was still charging on the floor, in the so-called optimal position for late night google marathons. Where would he have gone without Tommy, Spins, or his phone?

The logical conclusion?

Aliens.

Or like, kidnappers. But who the fuck cared about those kind of nobodies? Tubbo could destroy a bunch of kidnappers. And if he couldn't? Tommy would kill them for him.

His chest tightened and he hissed, glaring at the phone as it heated in his hand. He needed Tubbo back. And soon.

He turned off his phone, stuffing it back into his pocket. Useless. Tommy slipped out the door, ignoring Clem cooking in the kitchen. Breakfast could wait! The biggest of men had a rescue operation to lead and chaos to cause!

“Tommy? Your friend is here for you.” Clem said, not looking up from the stove. “They’re waiting at the front door. Told them they weren’t allowed to come in.”

Tommy definitely didn’t stumble slightly. Big men on rescue missions didn’t do that. “What-ah. Yup. Definitely know who’s here. Probably my hot girlfriend.” He said, trying to play it cool.

Did Tubbo send someone to tell him where he was? That wasn’t his usual style but if it let him find him, Tommy wouldn’t say he was mad.

But who? Ranboob was kind of a scaredy cat and Purpled was as chilly as the arctic ocean. And big men definitely didn’t feel jealous that Tubbo might have asked them to go with him. Definitely not. Tubbo and him were best friends and that bond came before island friends.

He straightens up slightly, walking over to the door and pulling it open. For a second, his mood lifted before plummeting again. “Wilbur? I thought you were busy today.”

“Oh, you know, I was just in the neighborhood and I thought I’d visit my favorite gremlin.” Wilbur said. He ran a hand through his even messier curls. There were smudged circles under his eyes that his glasses couldn’t hide.

“You look like someone kicked your ass.” Tommy observed, making Wilbur wince. It was true! A thick bandage covered the bridge of Wilbur’s nose and gauze peeked out from his sleeves. “Did you get fucking mugged or something?”

“Mugged is a good word for it.” Wilbur said, tugging down his sleeves. “But that’s not why I’m here! I wanted to know if you wanted to go to the music store again.”

Oh, that was slightly tempting. That music store had been sick as fuck. Way cooler than the ones back in England and the owner didn’t mind Tommy screamed along to the radio at the top of his lungs.

But on the other hand, Tubbo would never let him live it down if he got distracted and Tubbo rescued himself. Never. Tubbo collected blackmail religiously. Tommy would be more mad about it if the blackmail collection wasn’t shared with him too.

“I can’t, big man. I gotta go find Tubbo.” Wilbur made an odd wheezing cough. “He went out last night and I’m not sure where.”

“Well, he’ll come back soon, right?” Wilbur said. Tommy glared at him. “He seems like a smart kid.”

“He could be in trouble!”

“Why would you say that?” Wilbur said. “I’m sure he just went out for a walk and it went a bit long. I’ve done it before. I can ask my brother to go look for him.”

“Who cares about your brother!” Tommy yelled, not even feeling guilty about how Wilbur jerked slightly back. Techno had sounded kind of cool from the stories yesterday but Tommy didn’t care about stories, he cared about finding Tubbo!

He wasn't just going to outsource that!

"Well, I think he could just be out at the shops." Wilbur said with a wince. "How do you know it's a big deal?"

"Because Tubbo wouldn't leave me like that! He wouldn't!" Tommy said, his voice climbing suspiciously high. "Tubbo doesn't go places without telling me first! He's gone and somebody took him because that's the only way he wouldn't tell me! It doesn't matter what fucking shitty thoughts you have!"

The last time Tubbo had gone incommunicado, he had gotten his arm broken.

Tommy was never going to let him be hurt again. They had promised to stick together all those years ago, and he'd follow that, through thick and thin.

He flinched back from Wilbur's hands, glaring. He didn't want Wilbur's comfort right now. He wanted rage. "I'm fucking busy." He snapped, baring his teeth. "Go to the music store by yourself today."

"I'll come and search for him with you." Wilbur said. Tommy scoffed, stepping around him.

"What do you know about finding people?" He said, taking advantage of Wilbur's silence to step easily around him. "Fuck off. I'm not dealing with you today."

Maybe later he'd regret that, when he wasn't packed to the brim with anger, stress, and suspiciously fishy panic. Wilbur had been nice, almost big brother material.

But Tubbo came first. Just like Tommy would always come first for Tubbo because they had to come first for someone and why not each other?

"Toms--"

Tommy dodged his hand, breaking into a sprint. "I bet you don't even have a girlfriend!" He yelled at Wilbur, the harshest of insults he knew.

He could hear quick footsteps behind him but Wilbur was a lanky wrongun with no stamina to speak of. As the biggest of men, he was also the fastest man ever! Cheetahs marveled at his speed!

Okay, Tubbo could outrun him but that's because Tubbo was a machine powered by pure spite who had never heard of exhaustion.

It didn't take long for Wilbur to fall behind and Tommy grinned victoriously.

He didn't need that bitch! He'd find Tubbo all on his own!

...somehow.

Because Tubbo wasn't at the school. Or the pier. Or the little restaurant. By the time Tommy approached the library, he was running out of places to look.

It was a surprisingly big library too. He was expecting some tiny little one room building but nope, absolutely massive with a cranky old man who hushed Tommy as soon as he stepped inside.

Tommy debated screeching but then something in his chest had tugged and he had let it go, for now. Big men could be forgiving, sometimes.

“That’s how you do it. Ya Gotta earn their trust, yeah?” He whispered to Spins. The bee had to learn how to be a big man from someone and who else than from the biggest man himself?

He wove through the bookshelves, following the gentle tug in his chest with excitement. It led him to a crooked bookshelf, closing off one area that clearly hid Secrets.

“And then it’s about making an entrance.” He told Spins, creeping closer. Tubbo would kick him in the knee but it would be worth it.

“WHAT THE FUCK!” Tommy screamed, vaulting the bookshelf like a boss. He tripped, toppling over it halfway and landing in a bean bag.

Ranboo screamed back, throwing the magazine he was reading at Tommy. Challenged, Tommy screamed even louder to assert his dominance.

“Why are you screaming?!” Ranboo said, ripping his headphones out. Tommy paused, shrugging.

“Shouldn’t have screamed, bitch.” He informed Ranboo loftily. Didn’t he know that? Why scream if you weren’t expecting others to scream back?

“You jumped the bookshelf screaming! What was I supposed to do, man? I get scared easily!” Ranboo whisper yelled, pressing his face into his hands.

“That’s why you’ll never be a big man.” Tommy said, shaking his head. He looked at Spins. “This is an example of what not to do. Learn from him.”

“Why do you have a bee plushy with you?”

“He’s Tubbo’s and he’d get lonely. It’s my day for custody anyways.” He paid half for Spins, he got half custody when Tubbo was away.

All he had to do was make sure Spins never ever got dirty! Or in danger. Or ripped. High stakes.

But it was worth it to see Tubbo’s smile. Tubbo had been a bit sad ever since that home had destroyed his previous bee, claiming that he was too old for it. Tommy scowled at the thought of it. They had barely gotten Henry out of there safely.

“Okay. This is normal Ranboo. You can do this.” Ranboo whispered in his hands. Tommy shook his head. Spins better be learning from this. He looked back up at Tommy. “Why are you here anyways?”

“Tubbo got kidnapped and I thought he’d be here.” Tommy said with a shrug. Ranboo bolted upright.

“Tubbo got kidnapped? Why didn’t you lead with that? How do you know?” Ranboo said, leaning forward. “What happened?”

“I don’t fucking know! I woke up and he wasn’t there and he didn’t leave a note!” Tommy said, glaring. “He always leaves a note when he goes out.”

“Do you think it was a, you know, thing?” Ranboo said. Tommy stared at him blankly. “Like a fish thing?”

“Why would he be dealing with fish?”

“Like a water thing?”

“What the fuck are you saying.”

“Do you think it’s part of the mermaid thing!” Ranboo whisper yelled, throwing his hands up. Tommy nodded sagely.

“Why didn’t you say so, big man?” He said before shaking his head. “Fuck no. Tubbo wouldn’t experiment without a lab minion. It’s aliens, I’m telling you.”

“Well-“ Ranboo began before shrugging. “I have nothing to say to that. Do you have any important spots on the island? Places you’ve gone to?”

“No, I’ve checked them-“

Wait.

There was that spot.

“Ranboob, you might be smarter than I thought you were.” Tommy said thoughtfully. Ranboo tilted his head.

“Thanks? Maybe?”

“You should be thankful.” Tommy mumbled, jumping to his feet. He awesomely jumped the barricade again, definitely not cursing when he hit the ground hard before jumping up and sprinting out. He could hear clattering behind him as Ranboo scrambled after him, the cranky librarian shushing him as he ran out.

He knew exactly where he was going. Back to the beach. That little cove where he and Tubbo had talked.

It made sense! They had talked there yesterday. Maybe Tubbo had gone back this morning and got wrapped up in thinking. Sometimes he got so deep into thinking that he needed Tommy to pull him out.

The beach was still empty, this part of the beach being too hard for most of the tourists to find.

“Tommy!” He heard behind him.

Tommy ignored them, jogging across the sand. He could almost see the spot now.

“Tommy! Wait-“

Tommy stopped dead, skidding as his feet dug into the sand.

Right where he and Tubbo had sat, just above where the tide had been before it receded, were tracks. Tracks that were just the right size to be Tubbo's.

Tracks that ended in a giant skid mark.

Like someone had been dragged into the sea.

Chapter End Notes

Nobody's having a good time in this chapter except for Schlatt and Quackity. They're doing great.

Dangerous Waters

Chapter Notes

An apt chapter title

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy screamed, or the more manly option, howled with fury. He liked that description better. He sprinted the last stretch, practically throwing himself at the waves.

Noodle arms wrapped around him, yanking him back before he could hit the water. Tommy snarled. “Are you the murderer?” He snapped, slamming his elbow back while twisting to bite at their hands. They yelped, fumbling to move their hands away.

Tommy took advantage of it to try and throw himself at the water again, making them scramble to yank him back. He scowled.

He knew exactly who this must be! The murderer! The culprit! Tubbo had clearly gotten in too deep with the fucking library mafia or something and they were here to take care of him before he could find the truth!

How dare they!

Come back to finish him off? They better prepare to be surprised because Tommy would take them out! He was a hardcore fighter, people trembled in fear of him.

“I always knew someone would try to kill me for witnessing their criminal actions.” Tommy said. “Jokes on you! I can’t be killed by anything other than Tubbo or the Queen!”

And if something else tried he would simply Not Allow It. They could try it all they wanted but Tommy would just say No.

“Why is that something you think!?” Tommy froze, midway through trying to bite their wrist. He recognized that voice.

“Ranboo?” Tommy said. Ranboo sighed with murderous intents!

“Oh, thank goodness, you recognized me, I thought-“

“You’re the murderer!” Tommy yelled. “How dare you! How fucking dare you! I trusted you! I knew you were suspicious Boob boy!”

“How can you trust me and be suspicious at the same time?” Ranboo asked, confused. Tommy went for his throat while he was distracted. “Ack, no, wait-“

“I’m going to fucking kill you!” Tommy said, three octaves about his normal voice. Tubbo was his friend! Fuck the fish yelling at him, Ranboo was fucking dead for his crimes.

Who needed a court when you could be girlboss, gaslight, and gatekeep?

Ranboo let out a low sigh of pain before straight up tackling Tommy to the sand and lying on top of him, using his lanky limbs to keep him caged in.

Tommy refused to quit! He thrashed, clawing at the sand, occasionally trying to twist around to attack Ranboo. He’d fucking kill that bitch, and no halfhearted tackle would stop him! Ranboo was done! Finished!

Five minutes later, he slumped to the sand, wheezing. He spat out a mouthful of sand he had tried to bite when he got frustrated at Ranboo continually remaining unbitten. That bitch.

“You lasted longer than I thought you would.” Ranboo said, wheezing slightly. “Like, wow, that was like tackling a raccoon.”

“I’M NOT A FUCKING RACCOON.”

“Yeah, the raccoon was easier to pin.” Ranboo huffed. “Are you going to bite me if I stand up?”

“No.” Tommy said sulkily. He eyed Ranboo’s too far away arm, wondering if he should try again. “You’d deserve it though. Being a murderer and all.”

“...you’re going to try to get into the ocean again.” Ranboo said. His head thumped onto the back of Tommy’s neck. Success! Slowly but surely, he would wear down his willpower!

“...No.” Tommy said. Like a liar. But Ranboo couldn’t know that because Tommy was an expert liar.

Ranboo sighed. He did that a lot. “Alright, look. I’m not the murderer.” He said. “So maybe don’t bite me anymore?”

“And I’m just supposed to believe you’re not the murderer?” Tommy said skeptically. “That sounds like something a wrongun would say. The kind that murders people.”

“I don’t- I didn’t murder him!” Ranboo protested. He nearly moved to flail around before realizing who he was holding down. “Why would I have killed him?”

“Library mafia.” Tommy hissed. It made sense! He found Ranboo in a library! “That’s where you were plotting your evil deeds.”

“Okay, you know what? I walked into that one.” Ranboo said. “But think about it for a moment. Whoever did this dragged him into the ocean, right? I’m scared of water.”

Oh.

Wait. Tommy kind of forgot about that? And it could have been an elaborate alibi but he had seen his eyes when he fell into the pool. That was real terror.

“You couldn’t have held him with your frail little noodle arms anyways.” Tommy said with a huff. Tubbo was strong when he was mad, he had suffered enough headbutts to prove it. And Ranboo had little boney noodle arms.

“Why are you still insulting me- I held you!” Ranboo said, spluttering. “I did!”

“Because I let you.” Tommy maintained. Ranboo slowly thumped his head against Tommy’s back which was very rude and uncalled for. “Now let me throw myself into the ocean.”

“I can’t do that.” Ranboo said, keeping Tommy pinned. “Do you even have a plan for what you’re going to do when you jump in? Or were you just going to become a fish person in broad daylight and swim off into the unknown?”

Ranboo was really being rude right now and it was very uncalled for. “Tubbo is in danger!”

He was dragged into the water, who knows how long ago. At least since before Tommy waking up but who knows? This part of the beach didn’t get a lot of tourists so there wasn’t much to mess up the footprints. It could have been ten minutes ago. It could have been hours before he woke up.

The thought of Tubbo, alone, being attacked. Getting dragged in the ocean and swept away by who knows what. Because Tubbo would have come back if he managed to escape so if he didn’t that meant he hadn’t and Tommy really didn’t want to think of what could have caused that.

(Sharks, that weird fish thing that attacked the shark and who knew what the fuck else lived in that ocean-)

“I think we both need to take a deep breath and think about this.” Ranboo said. “Because I think I’m about to have a panic attack and those really suck and I’m hoping thinking through will make it less bad.”

“I never have a panic attack.” Tommy said, in between totally normal and not hyperventilating breaths.

“Right. Okay. Sounds fake but we can’t get into that right now.” Ranboo said. Tommy really wasn’t appreciating his skeptical tone. “So. What’s the plan?”

“The plan is to go in the ocean and fucking get him back?” Tommy said. “What are you missing here? Tubbo. Ocean. Go get him.”

Ranboo inhaled sharply. “Okay, yes, ocean is going to be part of this. But what’s the plan after that? Because tracks don’t stay behind in the ocean. He could quite literally be anywhere right now and we wouldn’t have a single lead to him.”

Tommy was quiet for a long moment.

He hadn't really thought of it that way. He was kind of hoping... that there would be some kind of trail. A secret message, Tubbo was big on those. He had seen the footprints and assumed they might lead somewhere.

But they wouldn't, would they? And the ocean was fucking huge. Not bigger than him, but big enough. He could search for ages and never see him.

What now?

"Tommy?" Something prodded his cheek. Tommy didn't respond, not even to snap at them.

"Tommmmy?" Ranboo tried again, slowly sitting up. Tommy didn't even bother to move off the sand. "Oh no. I broke him. Um. Uh. Oh no. Well, let's try to stay positive?"

"Where the fuck is he then?" Tommy said, not even hiding the uneven rasp in his voice.

"Where the fuck did he go? Tubbo wouldn't have just left me behind."

"It could be worse!" Tommy stared at him, lying limp on the sand. Maybe if he laid here long enough, the tide would sweep him out and he wouldn't have to get up. "Right. So. First off, we know he has to be alive still."

"Really?" Tommy said. And then coughed. "Yeah. Of course I know that."

Ranboo made a disbelieving noise, propping his chin on his hands. "I mean, for starters, look at the rock."

Tommy looked at the nearby rocks. They looked like plain old rocks to him. Neat rocks, lumpy and dark brown from the water soaking them with those little flecks of color. Salt crusted the top of the ones sticking out of the water further away, but the ones by the shore had been wiped clean.

"What about them?" He said. The rocks didn't have anything special. No notes from Tubbo, no maps, not even an arrow pointing the way.

"The tracks lead right to them. If something attacked Tubbo here, they would still be bloody on the top, right? There's no way the water could have washed off every trace from the rocks out of the water, the tide hadn't come in enough." Ranboo said, leaning forward and then quickly moving back, clearly thinking better of it. "Whoever pulled him in either wouldn't or couldn't kill Tubbo."

Tommy studied the rocks again. That... made sense. Some of the rocks were cleaner but salt was still smeared over the top. If someone had tried to hide the evidence, they would have completely cleaned it.

And there was no blood. "That rules out a shark at least, I guess." Tommy said.

"Tommy, sharks can't come up in shallow water and pull people in. You know that right? I want to be sure." Ranboo said, blinking quickly.

“Don’t lie to me, I’ve seen Jaws. Quite the documentary on sharks.” Tommy said. He was almost certain the shark did that. Maybe. It was a few years ago. “They could have just drowned him.”

Ranboo stared at him.

“What?”

“Tommy, you remember the, uh, fish person thing, right?” Ranboo said, glancing around nervously. “I mean, I dunno if I’ve seen it, but he was there with us. It’d be hard to drown him with the whole, well, gills thing.”

Tommy looked back at the water skeptically. “Then why didn’t he come back?”

“That’s the question isn’t it? What could have dragged Tubbo in the ocean and kept him from leaving?” Ranboo said. “Or, I guess a more likely answer, he could have escaped and is trying to dry off somewhere? I mean, if someone like Clay pushed him in or caught him,”

That seemed likely. It had been an absolute bitch to dry off before he got magical hair dryer powers. He couldn’t have imagine trying to do that alone. “So, he’s hiding somewhere?”

“Probably.” Ranboo agreed. “But why did he come out here anyways? Was he going to meet someone?”

Tommy frowned. Trickier. “He never said anything about it.” He said. “Which isn’t like him. Big T doesn’t tend to hide stuff like that, especially if it’s as risky as this.”

“Would he hide it from you if you could get hurt?”

“Probably not, he’d be too worried I’d get hurt trying to follow him.” Tommy said. He scowled at the footprints.

That was the part that kept bugging him. Tubbo had found something or someone dangerous out here. It was strong enough to drag Tubbo into the water. Why didn’t he bring Tommy along or at least tell him in a note? Why go out at night before Tommy even woke up?

Why leave him?

“Well, we can try asking Purpled?” Tommy made a face. “He’s the only one who has a boat and he might have heard rumors if it was a person who threw Tubbo into the water.”

“Fine.” Tommy said. Anything to find Tubbo. He got up, brushing the sand off of him. It didn’t work. The sand is forever.

Now, he’d just needed to find Purpled. But where the fuck was that dude anyways? Tommy spun around pointing in a random direction. “Run with me!”

“He’s probably in the dock in the other direction.”

“Run with me that way.” They got partway through the beach before Tommy heard a noise, causing him to stop and glance up the beach.

Hopes were dashed immediately because it was Wilbur running down the beach, not Tubbo. “Toms! Wait!”

Tommy rolled his eyes. “I know that hipster, I hoped my coolness would have fixed his hipster nature by now.” He said to Ranboo. “Don’t go feral. Yet.”

“I promise nothing!” Ranboo said in a far too chirpy tone.

Wilbur wheezed when he caught up to them, hands on his knees. Tommy waited graciously for him to catch his breath, frowning. He was still pissed about what he said. “I felt terrible about what I said.”

“You should.” Tommy said stubbornly. Wilbur had tried to distract him. Fucking rude!

“I know, I know. I fucked up. So I thought I’d offer to help to make up for it, you know. I brought my brother too, he knows the area around here. A real human gps.” Wilbur said. His brown eyes looked gold in the sunlight.

Tommy frowned looking past Wilbur.

“Hallo.”

“Dadzaaaaa!” Wilbur whined, flickering into the sea cave with a quick tail flip. He ignored Phil’s annoyed rattle when he barreled into the nest. “I fucked upppp.”

“Let me guess. You ignored what me and or Techno said and found out it had consequences.” Phil said, rolling his eyes as he started fixing the carefully woven seaweed mats.

“What are you talking about? I’ve never done that once in my life.” Wilbur said, flipping over and giving Phil wide, innocent eyes.

“Answer, little shit. I can’t do anything about it and Techno isn’t here to save you.” Philza said. Wilbur winced. At least Techno was still at that stupid human library. He would never hear the end of it if Techno was here.

“I’ve been summoned. I smell embarrassment.” Techno announced. Wilbur winced, head thumping into the next. “How much of an L this time?”

“It’s not... the end of the world?” Wilbur tried. Philza and Techno sent him matching looks of amused disbelief. “It isn’t! It’s just... yeah, it’s bad.”

“Be nice, Techno.” Phil chided, cutting off the cutting remark that was coming. “Let Wilbur spill the full details at least. I doubt it could be as bad as the whale shark incident.”

Wilbur winced.

“Ah.”

“Right. So to set the stage, I saw the pup in the market! Someone taught him how to change to human form and Phil. Phillll. He was so cute!” Wilbur said, propping his head up with one hand. He had no idea it was possible to be so cute but Tommy pulled it off.

His little sunshine. He liked the sound of that. It fit so perfectly with Tommy’s adorable golden hair and the way he lit up when he smiled.

“He looks like you.” Wilbur added, watching his dad melt a bit. “And he likes music too! I told him I played guitar and he lit up and made me promise to play for him.”

“My eyes aren’t that violet, who are you mixing me up with?” Phil said, mock annoyed. Wilbur rolled his eyes at his dad’s fake modesty. He didn’t have to rub it in that Tommy was practically a younger, more feisty clone of him.

A little adorable pup for him to raise and love and teach all sorts of tricks! He’d teach him how to bait the mako sharks, and sing, oh he was certain Tommy had a lovely voice.

Techno scoffed and Wilbur smugly ignored him. He knew it was a good idea to learn the human instrument. “I bet you wished you could meet him.” Wilbur mocked. Techno had claimed otherwise but he had been hunting everything that came near their den.

Techno smacked him on the shoulder. Wilbur faked whined, rubbing at his shoulder even though he knew Techno wouldn’t have put any real force into it. His protector could never.

“Less melting, more embarrassment.” Techno grumbled. “I want to mock you.”

“Feeling the love.” Wilbur said. He rested his hand on his palms. “So, while I was there, I saw that human there with him, the one I saw before.”

“You didn’t.” Techno said, already catching on. Wilbur waved a hand at him.

“And he pissed me off because he was clinging to him. And taking up all the time and attention I had rightfully earned! And it was so clear he didn’t take care of Tommy-“

“Not like we could?” Phil said with fond exasperation. Wilbur flushed slightly.

“Well, yeah, of course! Tommy’s a pup.” He said, wincing a little at his words. He continued before Philza could leap on that. “I got mad.”

“I thought we said to leave the humans alone.” Techno said, leaning closer. “Tommy’s fond of them, we need a tighter hold before he’s ready to lose them. It’s a delicate situation.”

Wilbur groaned. He had never given much thought to that argument. Pups were more important than human lives, right? Who cared if a few humans died to get them away from the pup?

Humans were dangerous and disgusting, they polluted the ocean without a single care. He had watched oil slicks sweep in and out, the opalescent fluid killing all the ocean life around

it. They overfished without a single thought as to the future.

And they were the same on land. Through centuries, he had watched ancient forests being cut away to satisfy the human's thirst for land. Centuries of history gone for creatures who didn't live more than a blink.

And so when he had found that humans had the pup, the one of them was clinging to the chin, he had been furious.

If that was how they treated life, how could they be safe for a pup? How could they protect one, meet their needs, and teach them about the world?

And more than that, who's to say they wouldn't turn on Tommy when they found he was something other, something better? Take his scales as a trophy, or show him off like an animal?

If Wilbur ever found the pod that had left Tommy on land, he would slaughter them all. You don't do that to a pup. It was so clear how Tommy craved love. And Wilbur had plenty to give!

Tommy deserved better and Wilbur had just wanted to give him that.

And if that gave him the opportunity to become even closer to Tommy, to show how much he loved and would cherish him? Lead him to the ocean and show him all the wonders it held for his precious little baby brother?

That was just a really nice bonus.

Techno was just being dramatic when he insisted it would be bad for Tommy. Wilbur couldn't see it. The human was just a blink in Tommy's life.

"It's not like it was a bad plan." He whined, curling up a bit. "I sang him out when all the humans were sleeping and I picked a beach far away enough that no one would see. It's not like it was going to be hard, it's clear he had no fighting skill."

"That's what you said about the pufferfish." Techno said. "Don't tell me that he punched you and got away. Embarrassing."

There was an edge to his voice. The Mer had lived in peace for so long because they either killed or forced humans to keep their secrets. Even as cameras grew more common, the Mer grew more clever at hiding.

If their secret ever got out, they would go to war to keep their peaceful lives. But the catch 22 was that that would mean losing their peace for a while!

"I was just going to eat him." Wilbur whined. "It's not a big deal! Nobody would have noticed some random kid going missing! He just would have been another drowning statistic or runaway. Nobody would have gone looking for him or cared."

“Except the pup who we are trying to get to like us.” Phil said pointedly, folding his hands. “An emotionally delicate pup who may still see humans as his podmates.”

Wilbur scowled. As if a human could ever be a good podmate for a pup. How would they defend them? Care for them? Even just swim with them?

At best, humans were just a tasty snack.

“So what did happen then if he didn’t escape? I doubt you’re feeling guilty about killing a human.” Phil paused. “Please don’t tell me the pup witnessed it. Wilbur. You little shit. Tell me the pup didn’t witness it.”

Wilbur winced. “Fuck, it’s not that bad!” He insisted. “I’m not a fucking amateur.”

“Then what happened?” Phil said. “You keep drawing the story out, mate.”

“When I pulled him into the water, he turned into a mer pup.”

The others froze. Wilbur sighed out a few bubbles, watching them drift up to the ceiling. He didn’t like thinking about it.

The fear in that poor pup’s eyes, still half drowning in their baby frills with stubby little claws that barely even scratched him. A scratch that was already healed, it was so shallow.

“Are you sure?” Techno rumbled, shifting closer. “Are you sure of what you saw?”

“Of course I’m sure! I saw the baby fins and everything. He’s almost the same age as Tommy, or the same. I’d bet with Schlatt on it.” Wilbur said.

“Podmates.” Phil sighed and Wilbur winced because yeah, they had to be. Looking back, maybe it wasn’t disgusting monkey things that had them clinging so tightly. But the instincts of little pups with no protectors.

“I gave him the whole song and dance about his gruesome death while he was under my song, and he was terrified.” Wilbur moaned. It was an absolutely terrible way to meet a tiny pup.

He wanted to prove himself to be a good protector! Not something to be protected against!

“Two pups.” Phil repeated. Wilbur frowned, about to make a joke about Phil’s old man memories before he glanced up and saw his face.

Philza’s face melted into fondness and Wilbur’s stomach lurched a bit as he remembered that he and Techno were the last pups Phil had seen. One pup were ridiculous rare.

As a curse, or at least Wilbur saw it that way, Mer rarely had children. One pup every couple of centuries was the norm and their birth was to be celebrated! Two pups? Two pups were rare. Sadly very rare.

And if one pup was very good, two pups were even better. The celebrations could last a century, two new bright souls growing up in the ocean. A miracle.

But also terrifying.

Pups were ridiculously delicate. A shark that would be nothing but a quick meal to an adult could massacre a nursery. Phil had joked about how they had run him and Kristin ragged keeping them safe from the world. And that was saying something with Phil's powerful magic and Kristin's terrifying skill as one of the few abyssal mer.

One wrong moment, and the pup was gone.

It took centuries of careful tending to get them to adulthood, when childish overly large fins became sleek and claws were sharp enough to defend themselves.

Phil flittered around the nest, pulling and tugging at the edges. Making it larger. "I'll need to call Kristin for this." He mumbled to himself. "I was anyways but we'll need her here even faster. She'll be over the moon when she hears this."

He paused, glancing up. "Two pups, no caretakers... I wonder- I'll have to check on that."

"Where are they then?" Techno said before Wilbur could ask, rising up with a steady beat of his powerful tail. "Why didn't you bring them with you?"

"I was going to!" Wilbur protested. "But the little pup panicked and made a distress call and fucking Schlatt attacked."

He had reluctantly been unsurprised though saddened by the distress call, a keening likely meant for Tommy.

Phil made a short rattle. "That close to the island is his territory." But unsaid that a pup held by one of their pod was theirs no matter what. Pup stealing wasn't uncommon. Phil had a fair few stories about defending his and Kristin's nest while she stole them back from another pod until they were old enough to have become true podmates. Mer loved pups but their rarity meant many pods competed for the few pups born. But it was daring to snatch one away from a mer so blatantly.

"Yeah." Wilbur scoffed. "But while I was dealing with Schlatt, Quackity whisked the pup away."

"I'll have a chat with them." Techno said darkly, swimming towards the cave entrance. "I should remind Quackity."

"Don't." Phil said. "Take Wilbur and go find Tommy. We'll need to make sure he's safe first. I'll fix up the nest and call Kristin." Phil said, humming. "And then I'll go remind Schlatt who's king around these parts. Wilbur, after you're done. go get more seaweed."

"Me? Why?"

"Because punishment, that's why. Chop chop, mate. We got two pups to prepare for."

Chapter End Notes

I think this is the first chapter where Tubbo doesn't show up

Also, Wilbur fucked up, haha. He's lucky Phil is more excited about there being two pups.

The Camera Never Lies

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Right. In. Out.

Fuck.

Okay. So. It could be worse. Tubbo wasn't quite sure how it could be worse because he had never quite seen this as a possibility in his 'what's the worst event that could happen' plans.

Sharks? Yeah, Tommy would absolutely try to punch a shark. Self confidence? He planned to lovingly bully Ranboo into having a spine. Friendship? Purpled might say they weren't friends but as far as Tubbo was concerned, friendship was an executive order he had made and therefore would be happening sooner or later.

He had even considered government experiments!

But never had he once thought, hm, what would I do if I got kidnapped by mermaids- mer apparently, who thought I was a baby?

Because that had to be what pup was. The weird wording, the way Quackity kept hovering around and Schlatt's odd hold. Which wasn't odd at all, but exactly how he had seen parents supporting their kids who were just learning to walk, to keep them from going face first into the ground.

There were claws but the claws were kept tucked away and it was gentle and-

Yeah. Fuck. He was getting off track.

And that was saying they were telling the truth. True, there was unmistakeable fondness in how they called him pup. But Tubbo hadn't gotten this far in life without coming to terms with the fact that it was him and Tommy (and maybe now Purpled and Ranboo) against the world.

Fosters could be nice but they didn't really want them. Not two wild kids who refused to be separated.

Which left an extra question on what exactly they got out of this.

This wasn't something he had planned for but apparently was something he was going to need to deal with! Which was bullshit and Tubbo wanted the name of life's manager so he could file a complaint. Lady Luck could meet him out behind the Denny's for a fistfight.

Current consensus wasn't good, he thought, eyes flickering between Quackity and the firm hold Schlatt had on him. Swimming was getting a bit smoother but could he outrun them? Probably not.

It was clear they were far bigger and judging by how fast Quackity had taken him far away from shore, fast enough to chase him down.

Which means he was going to have to talk his way out of this. Definitely not what he had planned.

Tubbo took a deep breath, watching the bubbles float up through the water when he exhaled. “I think you’ve got the wrong idea.” He said. First, he had to attack their argument. “And definitely the wrong person.”

“How so?” Schlatt said, sounding far too amused. Tubbo didn’t even bother testing his grip, knowing it would be far too tight.

“Well, for one, I’m definitely not a kid.” Tubbo informed him. In fact, as Tommy would say, he had never been one. He just straight up spawned. But he knew he definitely wasn’t that young. “I’m way too old to be one.”

“Yeah, your like, what? Two? Three?” Schlatt said. He rested his chin on Tubbo’s curls and Tubbo twitched as the considering hum vibrated in his head. That felt weird. That felt really really really weird. “Can’t be much more than three.”

What the fuck? He definitely wasn’t a toddler! He was short but not that short! Who the fuck did these guys think they were?

“Definitely more.” Tubbo said, nearly smacking Schlatt in the jaw with how quick he nodded. Quackity burst into a wheezing laugh.

“My man, definitely not. And Schlatt, you must be blind if you think he’s more than two.” Quackity drawled, tail flickering as he swam closer as if to examine Tubbo. “Two, bet on it. And the house always wins.”

“I’m not a toddler!” Tubbo yelled, feeling his cheeks warm and hoping they didn’t see. He was pretty sure they did by the way Schlatt snorted. “I’m a teenager! That’s not the same!”

“Of course it is! I know a teenager when I see him. That makes you between one and two by human standards, right?” Schlatt said. He briefly released one of Tubbo’s shoulders to make a sweeping gesture. “So I guess the house did lose this time.”

“Hey! I said not more than two! That was my bet! Don’t you be putting words into my mouth!” Quackity said. He said something in rapid fire, Spanish maybe? Sounded like Spanish, if someone was gargling water while they spoke. Tubbo started inching away.

“No, no, I heard you. You said two.” Schlatt said. His hand landed heavy on Tubbo’s shoulder, obviously noticing how he had started to sidle away. Tubbo cursed him. He was going to destroy this man. Absolutely wreck him.

“Back to me.” He said loudly. Could he distract them by making them argue? That was a possible plan. “Human teenagers are way older than two or three! You gotta be at least thirteen to be a teenager, you’re talking about toddlers!”

“Yeah, that’s what we’re talking about.” And Tubbo could quite help the surprised twitch. What? What was that supposed to mean? “Teenager means you can’t be more than two decades right?”

Two-

DECADES??

This could be an elaborate joke and to be honest, it was exactly the kind of joke he and Tommy would play on someone. But they sounded so honestly questioning when they were talking about it! Did two and three mean decades?

And- how old were they if they considered that to be a baby?

“Decades?” Tubbo said, his voice squeaking a little higher than he wanted. Another vibrating hum. Shoot, wait, change gears. “No, I’m way older than that.”

“Mhm.”

“You’re fishpeople, you don’t know that much about humans.” Tubbo bluffed. Mentally, he winced at himself. He could have spun that better. But he was so off guard from learning that they considered decades to be young. What the fuck did that mean? How was he supposed to deal with that?

“Definitely not. Give that angle a rest, kid. You were doing much better before.” Schlatt said, snorting. Tubbo rolled his eyes. Okay, Schlatt was right but he didn’t want to give him the win.

“But I’m not young! How would you even know?”

“You’re little.” Quackity informed him immediately. “Little tesoro.”

Tubbo couldn’t help a strange hissing sound from slipping out, glaring at Quackity who jokingly raised his hands to show his palms. “I don’t mean nothing by it but it’s the truth. You even have your baby fins still.”

“Baby fins?”

“Yeah.” Quackity said. He motioned to the fins that trailed up Tubbo’s size. “They’re always a bit too big for pups because you gotta grow into them.”

It was true now that he looked that Quackity and even the bit he could see of Schlatt looked far more sleeker. Meanwhile, Tubbo could even turn around without tripping over one of his fins, the annoying things constantly drifting by his face.

“How old are you?” Tubbo spluttered. How dare they call him small?

He had destroyed people for less!

“Almost a millennium now, I think.” Schlatt said, half to himself. He nodded, the motion ruffling Tubbo’s curls. “Yeah, that sounds about right. But Quacks here is way younger.”

“Only by two centuries, you fucker!”

Tubbo choked. A millennium? Like, one thousand years? This guy was one thousand years old? Fuck, Quackity was two centuries younger than that? His head spun with the math. That meant Quackity had to be at least 500 years old.

Fuck, no wonder they called him young. He was young, by their standards at least? Tubbo didn’t really consider them his standards. Even if he was young by their count, and fuck did it make sense they saw decades as baby (if they weren’t fucking around with him).

But by human standards, he wasn’t a baby. He was a teenager, so close to being an adult and aging out of the system. He was nowhere near childhood anymore, if he ever was.

“Yup. You’re just a little thing, aren’t you?” Schlatt said. One clawed hand came up, starting to carefully comb through Tubbo’s hair. Strangely, it felt kind of nice. “I thought pups like you were still in the nest at this age. Where did you find him, Quacks?”

“You saw and I told you.” Quackity said. But his eyes were still laser focused on Tubbo. “But where he came before that, I don’t know. On the island though.”

“No I didn’t!” Tubbo said, puffing up. He could not let them look on the island. He had no idea what they wanted from him but he didn’t want to gamble on it being anything good. Tommy was smart but he was impulsive.

The trigger was so so delicate. Just one wrong move, one splash of water, and they would know Tommy was also a mer. And even worse, he was certain Wilbur knew as well from their conversation at the beach.

He was pretty worried that if they went to the island, Tommy would try to do something dumb and fight them and then he would get caught too. Even worse, all of them could be captured. It wasn’t a secret that Purpled and Ranboo had been hanging out with him the last few days.

...or killed.

Fuck, Wilbur had tried to kill him.

Tubbo shoved that little piece of fear deep down. He had just had his breakdown, he couldn’t have another one yet. He needed to be productive and make sure they did not go to the island where they would most definitely find his friends.

“You knew about my shop though.” Quackity said skeptically. “And it would fit with why we hadn’t heard of a nest near here that had a pup.”

“Rotten trick. Smart, but rotten.” Schlatt said. “Hard to find a pup on that fucking island, but on the other hand, it’s horrible to keep a pup away from the ocean.”

“I’m not a pup!” Tubbo tried to argue. Okay, fuck. He wasn’t going to win this argument. It was clear by the bemused look on Quackity’s face, like he was just humoring Tubbo’s little quirks. “Right, well. Look, whatever you fucking want with me, I’m not letting you have it.”

“And what do we want from you?” Schlatt asked. “C’mon kid, you’re smart, aren’t you? What do we want from you?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Tubbo said firmly. Because that was an avenue of thought he didn’t plan to go down. It would do him no good and he could get wrapped up in circles, not now. Not when his friends’ safety rested with him getting home with their secret intact. “I have a home and I’m going back to it.”

“A bad one.” Quackity said with a scoff. He made faux strangling motions with his hands. “They just let you wander off alone to get attacked!”

Tubbo opened his mouth to argue but what came out instead was a squeak as he was suddenly spun around to face Schlatt. He tilted his chin up, forcing himself to meet his eyes.

Schlatt didn’t look quite what he thought he would. Honestly, weirdly, he looked kind of normal? The patterns of black and light blue on his scales made him look like he was wearing a suit jacket over a light blue shirt or sweater or something. He was slightly scruffy, like he had just rolled out of bed.

The only weird thing was the curling ram horns. Tubbo eyed those, curious why he had those as well. Fish didn’t usually have horns, right?

“And what do you plan to do exactly?” Schlatt said, and it was weird how he seemed to look over Tubbo without even moving. There was no clear threat, he just... existed. “Swim away? How far do you think you’ll get before the makos start frenzying? Or before Wilbur comes back?”

Unsaid was that Quackity and Schlatt would be hunting him as well. They may not have said it but Tubbo could see it in the anticipation, the tenseness.

“Yup.”

That got Schlatt to jerk back slightly. “Wait, what?”

Tubbo held his gaze, not flinching. He had found his niche and he was going to exploit it as much as he could. “In fact, I do plan to swim away. And you’re not going to stop me. I’m swimming all the way back to the island.”

“And why do you think we’ll allow that, tesoro?” Quackity said. “Why do you think the rest of our pod will allow it? Do you really think you can get around the two of us?”

Well, that confirmed they weren’t the only ones here. Great. Delightful. Tubbo filed that under major inconvenience. “Because if you don’t let me, I’m going to cause all the problems I can.” He said crisply. “I’m gonna scream and kick and throw myself to the first mako that swims past.”

He leaned in as best he could. "Because you seem pretty abysmal at this whole thing to me." He said. "I doubt you could even stop me."

Now, that for a reaction. Schlatt bared his teeth and Quackity made a weird hissing sound that made Tubbo's stomach flip flop but he held firm. Barely but still.

That got them to hesitate lightly. Tubbo pushed harder, trying to grind the point in. "If I'm wrong, then I'm wrong, aren't I gentlemen?" He said. "But if you stop me, I'm not wrong."

"You're betting." Quackity said, catching on first. "That you can swim back before life catches up to you and you realize you're too young to survive the ocean."

Not the way Tubbo would have put it but it would do. "Yeah. Yeah, I think I'm swimming back."

"And why would--"

"Sure." Schlatt said. His laugh was a shrill, half sane noise. "Go ahead, kid. You're not going to get far!"

"Schlatt!" Quackity said. More rapid fire Spanish. Schlatt rolled his eyes.

"Easier to let the kid come to terms with it. His pod was a bunch of dumbasses who never let him into the ocean, I'm not letting him throw himself at sharks because he hasn't a clue yet."

Tubbo bristled but decided to take the chance for what it was. He clumsily pulled himself away from Schlatt, awkwardly beginning to paddle.

This wasn't good. Definitely not. Tubbo didn't flinch, didn't move back but once he pulled away, he knew. Somehow, he wasn't sure, but he knew he wasn't alone in the water. He wasn't sure if he would rather it be the rest of the... pod was the word they used? Or a shark.

He really hoped it wasn't a shark. He didn't not provoke Schlatt into that bet and carefully anger him until he agreed, just to get eaten by a shark.

Or kidnapped. Kidnapping was a distinct, all too likely possibility.

It got a little easier as he kept swimming. His strokes started to become a little more confident and he started picking up speed. He was pretty sure this had to be the way back to the island, right?

He hadn't exactly been looking, too focused on his panic, but he was pretty sure based on the orientation they had had when they stopped. It would be pretty embarrassing if he missed the island and just swam around aimlessly.

Right. Positive thinking. Tubbo glanced back. Yup, shadowy figures in the distance. They were following him. He squinted suspiciously. Wait. Were there more than one?

He twisted his tail, trying to pick up more speed. He didn't know for sure but something told him that letting them trail him was a bad idea. He'd try to hide but where? He was in the

middle of the open ocean, he didn't exactly have good places to hide! From the little he remembered of their trip over, it was pretty much open deep water until you got to the main island.

And double fuck. What was he supposed to do when he got there? The beaches and water would be crawling with fishing boats and tourists by now. Could he wait till nightfall? Tubbo snuck a glance back. He could count about 3-4 four dim shapes. Maybe more, but it was hard with the darkness and how far away they were.

Option one. Bad option. If he made it back to the main island, he'd need to find a safe spot to dry off and wait. Maybe he could pull off the same trick as Tommy did but something told him he shouldn't be so sure of that.

Option two. Also bad. Wait till night before going back. Great idea!

Except dusk was hunting hours for sharks. And he was pretty sure Schlatt would cool off and lose patience eventually. The only reason his little bet gamble had worked was because Schlatt wanted him to come swimming back to him.

And worse? He wanted to. It sang in the back of his mind. Wilbur had been fear and terror since the moment Tubbo, or really the fish part of his brain, had seen him. The bastard had taunted him with his death and pulled him in the water and was a danger to Tommy and-

Fucking not following that road right now.

But uncomfortably, he could tell he didn't feel the same way about Schlatt and Quackity. They felt... safer somehow? Even if all they did was drag him away from the beach where he could have safely dried off and gone home to Tommy. But nope, fish brain didn't care about that. All it cared about was that They for some reason felt like people he should listen to.

Well, Tubbo was really bad at listening to people!

Maybe...

Should he go back towards the other island?

It was risky. He knew about the direction, from what he remembered of looking at maps of the island to find whatever weird mystical stuff had infiltrated the pool and transformed them. He knew the island was surrounded by rocks which was the 'normal' reason why people stayed away from there. No fishing boats went close. He'd need to check at the surface but from what he could see of the sun, it was promising.

If he swam there and got there before Schlatt, he could safely hide out on the shore and dry off. He wasn't quite sure what he'd do from there? He didn't have his phone or anything. But he figured either one of his friends would think to check there or he'd set the forest on fire to send smoke signals.

Either or.

Tubbo was broken out of his thoughts by a weird- sound? Sound fit even though it didn't feel right, more of like a vibration that shivered right through his new fins.

He glanced back suspiciously, wondering what was going on.

WERE THEY HERDING A FUCKING WHALE TOWARDS HIM??

Purpled had been having a good day.

Keyword there. Had.

The fish had sold well at the market yesterday. He'd need to adjust the amounts he'd catch for the next time, but it was easily enough to cover the repairs Dogchamp still needed. Little things, but things he had put off for far too long.

Having another person in his boat- he hated it but he had to admit it made getting money hand over fist easier. More nets could be set and they could pull in the haul faster. Plus, for once, he didn't have to man the stand all by himself which was a massive pain because Purpled was not a fan of customer service even if he could haggle a man out of his life savings.

Purpled had hated having to part with his hard earned money but Punz was a hard negotiator. He got a cut of the profits.

Though he didn't quite understand why Punz stuck around after that. Purpled looked out from under his hoodie, still bent over the engine as he checked it over.

"You know the rest of the week is just restaurant runs, right?" He pointed out, checking the fans. Still looked to be in good condition. "I'm definitely not paying you as much."

"We'll see about that." Punz said and Purpled rolled his eyes. He should kick Punz off his boat. He should. "You'll make more money if we take in a bigger haul though, restaurants will take whatever they can get around here."

Purpled scoffed. "You talk like I'm keeping you on my boat." He said. He should kick him out of principle.

He doesn't and keeps working on the engine.

And that's when the screeching starts.

"PURPLE FUCK." Purpled glared down at the engine, twisting the wrench a bit harder than maybe necessary. Not responding. He brutally shoved down the part of his chest that seemed to sing at the fact that they were here. Ugh.

"Oi, PURPLE FUCK!" Maybe he could just drive away. Or he would if his engine wasn't still halfway through repairs and check. He wasn't totaling Dogchamp to flee. "Over here!"

Even if it felt like a good idea.

Purpled smacked Tommy's hand away from the engine. "Don't touch that." He said, standing and trying for a scowl. It didn't come out quite as he wanted it, too relaxed. Fuck, he hated the way even seeing them made him suddenly relax, it wasn't right.

They weren't terrible but Purpled wasn't good to be best buddies just because a fish told him to.

He had dragged along other people too. Ranboo, some weird hipster he hadn't seen before, and some massive dude with pink hair.

"You should have looked up when I screamed for you, bitch." Tommy retorted. Purpled glared down at the engine again. "Why were you fucking ignoring me?"

"I'm not playing water taxi for you again." He said. The pay wasn't half bad but he still maintained he should have gotten hazard pay for that first trip. Or just not taken the money, as much as it pained him to say so. He made all his money off of the ocean and now one wrong move, and he was up a creek without a paddle. And honestly, he had gotten pretty tired of dropping everything to play taxi.

"Oh my god you fucking bitch seriously can you be serious for one fucking second fuck--"

Purpled looked down at the engine. Maybe he should see about replacing a few of the bolts in there now that he had a bit of leeway in finances. Just a few. He tuned out Tommy's ranting, poking at them with the wrench. Nah, just loose.

"It's about Tubbo." Ranboo broke through quietly. And Purpled couldn't help the slight twitch.

See. He didn't fucking like any of them. If it wasn't for the whole fish thing, he doubts they would have kept talking to him. Ranboo and him had sat at the same table for years and rarely spoke, Ranboo always hunched over a book.

But Tubbo was a little better. Marginally better. Weird and hectic and just as much trouble but- better.

("If I still got to know you? Probably.")

"What about him?" Purpled said, keeping his own voice even. No point in panicking or screaming even if he could feel his heart slowly begin to beat faster. It crept him out how he could almost feel the fish part of him stir. It was weird to feel the rising concern when before he knew he would have scoffed and used this to fleece them for every cent.

"He was fucking gone this morning." Tommy said with a huff. Purpled raised an eyebrow. And? "He didn't leave a note or anything."

"Huh." Purpled said. Part of him wanted to reject it as dumb. But he had seen Tubbo when Tommy and Ranboo had snuck off to that party one time. He had been meticulous about the notes. Why go incommunicado this time?

And why not ask him? Purpled could feel something curdle in his gut, sour and heavy. It was clear Tubbo had likely gone off island, he had no doubt Tommy had started tearing the whole place apart when Tubbo had gone missing. Why hadn't he asked Purpled to help him?

And who would he have asked instead?

"Sure he didn't try surfing and fuck up?" Punz said, leaning heavy over Purpled's shoulder and staring down the new people. They glared back. Purpled swatted half heartedly at Punz but he didn't budge. "There's a lot of riptides around the island."

"He wouldn't have." Purpled said absently, cutting off Tommy. Tubbo wasn't the type to try that without Tommy, if only so he could laugh at the results.

And because of the fish thing but he wasn't saying that in front of Punz.

Tommy huffed. "I went down to the beach and I saw footprints that matched his." He said, his eyes meeting Purpled's. "Something had pulled him into the water."

What the fuck.

Part of him immediately jumped to some kind of tourist or prank by Clay. Maybe one of those fishing boats that were fronts. But the way Tommy said it meant that it was serious.

Something had pulled him into the water. And Purpled could almost feel the phantom scales crawling over his skin.

"Like someone on a boat or something." Ranboo said, awkwardly chuckling as he side eyed all the non fishpeople here.

No seriously, what the fuck? Purpled spun the wrench in his hand, considering that. Who had managed to pull Tubbo in the water? And why?

"I haven't heard anything like that happening around here." He said. And he would have. Gossip traveled fast on the pier. If someone found Tubbo's secret, he would have known. Ranboo slumped a little. "But you're gonna need your own boat to look around."

"What-"

"Are you fucking kidding me." Tommy said, stomping his foot. "Are you really not going to fucking help us! Why do you have to be such a bitch? He could be in trouble."

"Hey, leave him out of it." Punz said. Hipster rolled his eyes.

"Well, that's quite rude of you." Purpled kept his face stony, ignoring his snide tone as he folded his arms.

"I warned you, I'm not playing water taxi anymore." He said. He glared down Tommy, seeing the other huff. Well, huff was a nice word for it. Tommy looked incandescent with rage. "Don't your new friends have boats or whatever?"

They certainly looked rich enough for it.

“I’ll pay you.” Ranboo offered. He shrank a little under Purpled’s gaze. “Whatever you want.”

“The answer is no. Get away from Dogchamp.” Purpled said sternly. He shrugged Punz off his shoulder, kneeling down to look at the engine. A clear brush off.

Tommy made a strangled sound of pure rage and he could hear the scrape of shoes against wood as he was pulled back. “Take the L, kid. I have a ship on these docks anyways.” Unknown voice, probably pink haired rich guy. “The more we wait, the harder it’ll be to find your friend.”

“You’re a bitch.” Tommy spat as he let pink haired guy pull him away.

Purpled didn’t even look up as they walked away. Slowly, methodically, he put the engine back together. Meditative almost.

All too soon, it was done. He set the wrench down with a soft clank. “Get off my boat.” He could feel more than see Punz jerk with surprise.

“Look, I’m sorry for needling you about the money earlier-“

“Off for a bit. I’m going out. Use the money and go do something else.” Purpled said, biting back the more inhuman sounds that rose so easily now. “Shoo. Or I’m not letting you back on. Your fishing spot sucked anyways.”

Punz stared at him for a few moments. Purpled stared at him stonily. He meant it this time. He would kick Punz off permanently, as useful as he was. “Fine.” He said, his blue eyes dark. Purpled kept a close watch on him as he stood up, stepping onto the pier and walking away.

Purpled untied the ropes, kicking up the engine.

He wasn’t looking for Tubbo. He wasn’t. No fish instincts were going to control his life and he wouldn’t bend over backwards for someone who could have ulterior motives for their kindness. Tubbo was the best of the worst but that meant nothing to him.

He set the boat for the open sea. Maybe he’d take a drive to clear his head. He couldn’t be blamed if he found anything, after all.

A random course for a peaceful day. Seagulls flew overhead, Mako Island loomed in the distance. A whale surfaced briefly in the distance, water spraying into the air. Not a bad day for fishing and Purpled cursed himself for leaving his equipment back at the pier. What had he been thinking?

The boat rocked. Purpled leaned back with a frown, moving to counteract the waves. That had been a bigger motion than he expected, considering the whale was so far away. “Easy, boy.” He mumbled to his boat. Slowly, it settled.

Then a hand shot out of the water and yanked at the side. Purpled cursed, fumbling to the opposite side of the boat, one hand grabbing onto his wrench to use as a clumsy weapon.

If anything tried to capsize his boat, they'd need to go through him first.

The hand was covered in green scales and before Purpled could smash it, the boat rocked and a face shot up over the side. A face he remembered, panicked and eyes wide. Tubbo scrambled at the side of the boat, trying and failing to pull himself up. He yelled something unintelligible, half gargling on ocean water.

“What the fuck are you doing!” Purpled yelled at him out of reflex. “You’re going to capsize us!”

He jerked forward, not even sure himself whether he was going to pull Tubbo in or push him back into the water. And then Tubbo screech, a high sound that set off his nerves like a live wire and suddenly the water bubbles and *fucking yeeted Tubbo into his boat what the fuck.*

“Fucking punch it! They’re right over there!”

God fucking damn it, he was not paid enough for this.

Chapter End Notes

Schlatt: I’m gonna show this pup that he needs me as his caretaker >:(
Tubbo: WHERE DID HE GET A WHALE?? WHY??

Sink or Swim

Chapter Notes

Purpled: I hate them, I don't care, they're just money to me

Tubbo: *in danger*

Purpled: How fucking dare you touch him, I'll fucking fight you

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled doesn't even think, he just grabs for the motor and throws it into full gear. The move was easy, practiced. With the other hand, he scrambled to pull Tubbo into a more secure spot before he flipped the boat, holding him by the wrist.

It was weird (but somehow good) to see scales where normal human skin should be.

“What the fuck did you get yourself into?” He yelled over the sudden rush of the wind, scanning the sea for boats. He didn't see any there and for a moment his brow furrowed, uncertain of the course he could chart. There was the whale but-

Okay, if there was anyone who could have a whale hunting them down, it was probably Tubbo and Tommy. They practically personified 'live fast and die fighting a god'. Tubbo might have scammed the whale out of something.

But Tubbo had said “They're right over there”? What was he even looking for?

Whatever it was, Purpled was absolutely gunning it. Dogchamp was a champ on water, even if they were a bit old and he was pushing it as much as he could go. It should keep ahead of the whale, if that was what was chasing them.

“Are you concussed down there?” He yelled, taking a second to glance down at Tubbo. He didn't see any bumps or bruises but Tommy had mentioned him being dragged. Purpled gritted his teeth. If they had injured Tubbo-

“I'm fine!” Tubbo said, looking up at him. They were trying to work their way into a sitting position and suddenly Purpled realized he was still holding onto their hand. He let go quickly, trying to play it off as needing the hand to shade his eyes as he looked at the sea. The hand he used felt oddly itchy, strange where it scraped against his head and Purpled lowered it quickly, half hiding it in his lap.

He didn't look down, knowing what he would see. The beginning of violet scales, coaxed out by water.

“We'll be back to the home base island in an hour.” Less, if he had his way about it. Purpled knew all the shortcuts through the common routes, where you could steer through the more

treacherous stretches instead of around them. Purpled veered the boat sharply to the left.

“No, no, no, other way!” Tubbo said and Purpled smacked at his hands before he could grab for the controls. “They’ll cut us off!”

“What?” Purpled said. Okay, he had been joking about the whale thing, but was it actually following them? And pretty fucking fast too. There was no way they could go back, not with its massive bulk.

“I wasn’t thinking.” Tubbo said, eyes wide as he pushed himself up using the seat. “Okay, we’ll, I kind of was because I knew that going back to the island alone was risky because trying to dry off with tourists but they expect us to go there! They’re herding us.”

Okay, if Purpled was catching what he was saying, someone was using the ocean to their advantage. Which, great, fuck, he needed hazard pay for this. But on the other hand, where the fuck were they? All he could see was the whale and what might be some of its whale friends? Maybe? Could be some of the larger fish in the area.

“I don’t see anything.” He said drily, noting back the concern that leaked into his tone. But he kept his hands on the controls.

“Purpled.” Tubbo said, and his quiet voice was barely audible over the rush of the wind. “We’re not the only Mer here.”

It takes a moment for it to hit Purpled because what the fuck is a Mer?

And then the boat rocks and Purpled is throwing himself to the side, trying to counterbalance, and slamming it into a turn at the same time, scrambling to keep from capsizing. Tubbo *screams*, high and shrill, a sound that makes Purpled’s heart slam against his ribs. It aches to hold the sound back in his chest, something he knows will be inhuman and wrong. (But comforting, his mind whispers. Inhuman but somehow he knows it will comfort Tubbo).

And then it doesn’t ache anymore.

Because Purpled looks into the water and sees someone looking back at him. It takes a moment to compute the electric blue and tan fins that fluttered around what had to be spikes (that were also blue??). His brain refused to see it for a moment, the way dark brown hair fluttered around a far too human face.

They grinned back at him with a mouthful of shark teeth.

Oh, he definitely should have been paid more for this, Purpled thought to himself. And the back of his mind, the fish brain was screaming.

“Back the fuck off!” He hears Tubbo shriek as he scrambles to get the boat back under control. lists violently, the motor sputtering and Purpled realizes with horror that the fishperson, mer or whatever, was holding onto the boat. Their tail was rippling under the water, forcing the boat from moving.

“Do you know what that does to my motor?!” He screams in anguish, fumbling with his free hand. It holds a warm metal weight and Purpled chucks it with dead accuracy, his reflexes honed from years of throwing things at people who aggravated him. “YOU’RE FUCKING PAYING FOR THAT.”

The fishperson lets out a startled screech as the wrench gets him right between the eyes, releasing his grip and falling back into the water. It takes Purpled’s iron grip to keep him from falling back into the boat as it suddenly lurched forward.

“What the fuck did you get yourself into?” Purpled said as he veered hard right, following a route that he knew by heart now. He had traced it out far too often on his maps the last few days, something in his chest urging him to go back there. Wrong, he knew, because he should need his maps and compass right now to make a sudden deviation from his normal routes. Because he should know his way back to the main island the best.

And yet, he just knows where to go. It all makes sense in his head. He’s not questioning.

“I didn’t do anything to deserve this!” Purpled opened his mouth to say something biting and sarcastic about Tubbo’s choices but-

Tubbo shivers where he’s laying, wrapping his arms around himself. He’s still drenched, normally fluffy curls plastered to his head and making him look even smaller, even with the ridiculously large fins. He doesn’t reach towards Purpled anymore, the both of them knowing that it’s far too dangerous right now.

He can still feel scales itching from underneath his skin. Not as bad as fully submerging, but they both know how much more difficult it would be to steer the boat if he was having to wrangle an entirely new set of features.

It hurts, a pang deep in his chest that does want to reach out to Tubbo. To comfort him and tell him that everything is going to be alright, even if Purpled isn’t sure himself. But he doesn’t. Instead he sits back into his seat and focuses on cutting a swerving path through the water.

It’s pointless, he tells himself. It’s true. Not what he was asking, but true. Tubbo got into trouble but there was no way he’d be stupid enough to get into this kind of trouble. Not at least without some kind of backup. And if he found evidence of mermaids, he would have dragged them all into another one of his secret stupid meetings.

(What was worse, a hidden voice wondered. Caring because of the fishbrain or caring just because he cared?)

“How many.” Purpled said, gritting his teeth and watching the water. The whale was still further away, which was good because his boat would definitely not stand up to a whale. He hadn’t exactly raced a whale before but he was pretty sure they weren’t incredibly fast. Semi sure.

“Two that I knew of, but that one was different.” Tubbo said, pulling himself back up. “They talked to me, and I baited them into letting me swim back to the island with the premise that

if I couldn't, I'd lose."

Lose what was the question because Purpled was pretty sure that Tubbo didn't mean money right now. There was something tight to the way he said it, the way he was watching the water. They had asked for something big. "Bad bet." He said. "That's a far swim from here."

"I wasn't exactly sure how far I was and I needed to- left!" Tubbo yelled. Purpled swerved without a thought and the boat rocked as a dark shadow shot barely past it. He cursed, some of the more creative swears he knew from the dock. "I'm gonna need to remember those. How far is it to Mako?"

"It's gonna be a while longer." Purpled said, gritting his teeth. Not quite as slow as getting to the main island, but a good twenty minutes or so. That felt like eternity and he was already speedrunning calculations in his head. Dogchamp was fast but he didn't like his odds with how fast that shadow was moving and the strength of the one that grabbed the boat.

Especially not when they hit some of the more treacherous stretches. There would be far less room for risky turns. Purpled could make it at speed, but maneuverability? He wasn't so sure if he could handle that.

"I can hop back overboard." Tubbo offered and Purpled refused to look down at him. But he knows somehow that Tubbo is already reaching for the side. "It's not a big deal, they're after me. I think- I'm almost certain that my calculations were wrong and we can probably swim a lot faster than I thought. I'm small too and the boat's big and easy to flip. They don't want to hurt me. I think."

Unsaid was that they both knew what would happen if the boat flipped. Purpled had refused to change again after the first time. He didn't know what exactly they wanted Tubbo for, but whatever it was, Tubbo didn't want him wrapped up in it.

For a second, he lingered on the possibility before turning firmly away. No.

"Get your tail back into the boat, dumbass." Purpled said, Tubbo yelping as a spare screwdriver smacked his hand before clattering back inside the boat. "Tommy would scream my ear off if I got you kidnapped and I'm kind of attached to my ability to hear. Mako. Yeah. I can do that."

"But-"

"They might not even leave me alone after they get you." Purpled said. He glared at the water, steering hard and trying not to gasp at the speed at which the Mer turned after the boat. "And then you're caught and nothing is accomplished but me getting to yell at you for being stupidly noble."

"Let a boy have his noble sacrifice." Tubbo said, slumping back. "I just want to tragically fling myself out of a boat and have a soap opera scene where we talk about how we really do care for each other and will remember each other forever for ten minutes despite being in a high speed chase."

“Pay me, and I’ll throw you into a pool. Tommy will do your little chat with you.”

With that, Purpled turned back to watching the horizon, gritting his teeth. They were close. He could see the smudge of the island against the sky. But he didn’t say it. He steered hard, the boat nearly tilting as it hit a wave. It was fine, he could steer it. He had this. He fumbled for a drawstring bag, instead kicking it over to Tubbo. “Throw these.”

Tubbo grabbed it and opened the bag. “Why do you have a bag full of rocks?” He said, blinking in surprise.

“In case people don’t pay me.”

Tubbo shrugged, opening the bag and starting to pelt the mer with rocks. He had pretty good aim but not as good as Purpled. It wasn’t going to be enough and Purpled grimaced, steering carefully.

“They’re still herding us, aren’t they.” Tubbo said, and Purpled grimaced. His face was screwed up in thought, glaring at the water. “They’re fast and if- if what Tommy saw was also a Mer, they hunt makos. It’s a game to them.”

“Yeah.” Purpled said without elaborating. He could see the pattern now. One would rush, forcing him to turn while the others hung back. Dogchamp was fast but the boat wasn’t mako shark fast. And it certainly didn’t have the same agility. The mer were playing with them.

He had a few suspicions as to why. For one, having to dodge was about to get far more treacherous, they were about to hit the rocky area. And for two, every dodge forced him to correct just a little bit more before they were forced away from the island. Cumulative effects.

It reminded him of one time, when he had taken the day off to go reef fishing. Their reefs around the island weren’t exactly pretty but they were neat enough. He had been reeling in some good profits when he saw it. A smaller grouper, probably a young one, was darting across the reef. Reef sharks nipped and chased it.

Eventually one got a full bite and it descended into a feeding frenzy. And he did not like the look of those teeth earlier.

“It’s fine.” Purpled said through gritted teeth, keeping most of his focus on the course. He had to start weaving in earnest now, making his way through the rocks. At least this meant the whale could keep following so closely. One breach would definitely destroy Dogchamp. “They haven’t paid me yet.”

“Haven’t- Do you require people to pay you to kill you?” Tubbo said. He burst into stuttery giggles. Purpled nearly shrugged before remembering he had to keep his focus on the controls. “Oh, that’s genius. I should do that.”

“Pretty expensive too, though I’m going by the shark bite calculation.”

“There’s calculations! You gotta show me this book.” The fear and sadness was still there but it was mixed with humor as Tubbo kept giggling. “I’ll break into your house if you don’t.”

That got Purpled to really roll his eyes. “Money to see the book.” He reminded. He didn’t just go around showing off his work for free. That’s how you got taken advantage of in life and Purpled was not a sucker.

The island was growing clearer now but the attacks were increasing. He was starting to see the mer better, flashes of light blue, pale green, gold, and electric blue. And that’s what he could make out as they darted and lunged at the boat. It was all he could do to maintain the course without one of them hitting the boat. His heart felt like it was beating a mile a minute against his ribcage, his breathing quick and fast despite his attempts to get it under control.

Tubbo squinted at the route ahead, attention briefly snapping away from the mer snapping around their heels. “Is that a boat up there?” He asked. “By the island.”

Purpled glanced away from the water, further up. “Sure is.” He said through gritted teeth. “One of the fancy ones too.”

One of the really fancy ones. He had seen those boats around, more like a mini yacht with all the luxuries and more speed than any pleasure boat could have. Saw the idiots that came with too. But he hadn’t heard about anyone coming out to the island, not since the last failed real estate attempt, and Purpled kept track of all the chatter. Rich people meant rich wallets.

“Why are they out here?” Tubbo said, unintentionally echoing Purpled’s thoughts. The thought of someone being out here, at Mako island, made his chest feel strangely fizzy and angry. Nobody but them should be out here.

“No clue.” Purpled hissed, choosing to ignore how he sounded like an actual hiss. Nobody just came out here, not with the myths around the island. Some stupid kids like them, maybe, but everyone stayed far away. “There aren’t any boat tours here since that last touring company went under-”

He cut off with a curse, nearly scraping a rock with having to swerve. He flipped off the gold patch mer, ignoring how they bared their teeth at him. “Underwater.” He finished smoothly, bringing the boat back down to cruise through the water. “Major tragedy.”

“Huh.” Tubbo said, wincing a bit. Oh. Yeah. Some of that made a lot more sense now. I mean, the tour captains were idiots and Purpled could have sailed better than them with one arm tied behind his back so they definitely weren’t worth their salary. But getting attacked by apparently murderous mer would explain some of the oddness.

He eyed the ship. It shouldn’t be too much of a problem. They’d go by it to get to the island but it was still a few miles off.

They just had to get through the rocks. Once they got through the rocks, he could kick the speed up again, push it even faster. It wouldn’t be good for Dogchamp but Purpled hated losing even more.

They cleared past the rocks-

A jerk.

“Alright, pup, that’s enough of this.” The rock thudded into a clawed hand and the light blue and black mer easily tossed it aside, grinning with shark-like teeth. The grin dropped when he saw Purpled and Purpled felt his through tighten and the need to bare his teeth back. “Game’s over, kid.”

“Fuck off!” Tubbo snarled and it was a profoundly weird experience to see him sort of scrunch in on himself and fins flare. It probably wouldn’t have been more intimidating if he was in water. Instead, it just made him look like a mildly threatening blob.

But it made Purpled furious. He pushed one arm in front of Tubbo, trying to pull the other behind him. “Leave him alone.” He snarled. The mer’s eyes flicked to him and they sneered before looking back at Tubbo. Like he wasn’t even worth the time of day.

“Get in the water.” He said. “Nearly gave me a fucking heart attack jumping in the boat like that. What the fuck were you thinking? A fucking human?”

“He’s my friend!” Tubbo snapped and Purpled ignored the way it made his heart splutter. It was just to get this crazy guy to go away, he told himself. “We had a deal. I’m not getting in the water, I’m going to the island and leaving. And you can stop me. What are you going to do? Kill me?”

Purpled choked like what the fuck, that’s his line. And also don’t challenge shark man to kill you?

“I won’t kill you, pup.” The mer said, looking... fondly frustrated? “But how about this? You get in the water, or I’ll kill that stupid human.”

Purpled opened his mouth to snap, to drawl that he would like to see the stupid mermaid try but then something wrapped around his hood, and *yanked*.

He fell with a heavy thump, breath wheezing out of him. His neck craned until it was almost painful and violet eyes widened as he looked into the dark eyes of the electric blue mer. But he couldn’t focus on the way they smiled, their teeth tinged red.

All he could think about was the water just a few inches below his head. Just one tug, and it would be back. The scales, the fins, everything. They’d see everything.

His next breath came as a panicked wheeze, half watching the water lapping below him. His limbs locked up, one hand grasping useless for the edge of his boat. (Irrationally, and he would never say it and always deny it, he wished Punz was here).

Tubbo shrieked and he felt clawed hands fumbling for his hoodie. The inhuman return shriek became a swear as he was yanked even closer to the water, precariously hanging out of the boat.

“I wouldn’t do that if I were you. Come too close, and I hold no responsibility. Who knows what might happen if he hits the water?” Electric blue mer said. Purpled felt something in his stomach curdle at the words. Did they know somehow? “One drop of blood and the sharks frenzy quick here.”

Oh. Better. Not great because if he was dying by sharks, he better get paid for it. But at least they didn’t know. He didn’t know what he would do in that case.

“What do you want?” Tubbo hissed, his fumbling attempts tipping. “I just want to be left alone! Why are you chasing us! I told you to go away!”

“Pup.” Golden black mer broke in. There was a flicker of green but Purpled couldn’t exactly look. How many of these fucks were there? And oh, Purpled was going to start charging him if he kept using that word. He glared at the electric blue mer. They stuck their tongue out at him. “We just want you to be safe, yeah? You’re so little and the ocean is so big. The humans will kill you if they find out who you are, they always do.”

Fuck, how many of them were there? One or two, they had not great odds. But how could there be this many? They were fucking huge too! Purpled knew every inch of these waters, how had he missed this for so long?

“No, they wouldn’t.” Tubbo protests.

“I doubt your little friend here wouldn’t sell you out for a chunk of change. Purpled has quite the reputation.” Purpled froze, eyes widening. They knew him? “He sells just about anything and not bat an eye. Do you think he just fishes? Really? Everyone knows him as the guy who’ll do anything for some cash. Secrets, favors, you name it.”

Purpled didn’t tense. He didn’t. If Tubbo cared, he would have no by now because they were right, it was no secret. It was something Purpled did to cover bills and get money and he was fine with it. He didn’t care that everyone avoided him unless they had a favor to ask because they knew his next job might involve them. He didn’t care at all. Tubbo was just another on a long list of people who couldn’t handle it.

A soft shuddering warble that tugged at his heart.

“Let him get back safely.” Tubbo demanded and Purpled’s eyes flew open, his head twisted, trying to see Tubbo but he slid, just a bit more, and had to stop. All he could see was the very edge of the mer and the sailboat, oddly much closer now. There was a distant splash sound. Had Tubbo jumped? No, his next words came from the boat still. “He goes home safe and you don’t touch him or his boat. No drowning or eating or anything and I’ll go with you.”

“Tubbo-” Purpled rapped because Tubbo couldn’t fucking do that. He couldn’t go with these guys. He could and the thought of it made his chest squeeze. He fumbled at the edge of the boat again, wanting to grab Tubbo and tell him he couldn’t go and answer his warbles. Fury boiled in his chest, rage that these guys thought they could take his (podmate, hatchmate, nestmate) client away. “Don’t you fucking dare-”

“Fine.” The mer said with a sigh. “Get in the water and we’ll put him back and let him go.”

“No!” Purpled said instinctively, trying to fight. It jumped, dipping almost into a panicked warble. “Tubbo, you absolute moron-”

“Tell Tommy not to be stupid.”

“I’ll pay you guys-”

And the the boat rocked and Purpled’s hoodie was released and he was screaming and he didn’t know why he scream out of fear or anger or panic because that must be Tubbo jumping and he was falling.

Cold hands grabbed his hoodie, yanking him forward just in time and Purpled choked as he looked up into Tubbo’s wide confused eyes. No time to think because light blue mer roared and the boat was suddenly jetting forward. Purpled scrambled for the controls, slamming them as far as they could go.

He doesn’t speak until they’re pulled up on sand, Purpled carefully to hop into the dry sand before turning back and hissing. He doesn’t care for a moment that the sound was wrong because it felt right. A scold and panicked relief all at once.

“I didn’t want them to hurt you.” Tubbo whined. Purpled scoffed, reaching forward and lifting the other onto the sand. Tubbo’s hands wrapped around his arms, head half craned towards alshing waves in the distance. “You were scared, I knew you were scared.”

“I was fine.” Purpled said. “Totally under control. You hadn’t even paid me yet. Were you really gonna run out on your bill?”

That brings a bemused smile to Tubbo’s face but before he can answer, he’s looking past Purpled. Purpled spins around, spreading his feet and raising his hands, solidly planting himself in front of Tubbo. The sailboat was pulling up to the beach, a little rowboat dropping into the water.

He could kill them, he calculated instantly Rowboat like that, it looked like there were only two people riding. There were spots in the water where the bodies would sink and no diving happened there. It was easy and no one would ever know what happened. Dead men tell no tales.

“Wait.” Tubbo said, grabbing his ankle. Purpled frowned, looking down at him. But they were in danger, he couldn’t just wait!

“TUBBBBBBBOOOO!”

Why was Purpled not surprised. He let out a frustrated sigh as Tommy leaped onto the beach, sprinting towards them. Ranboo was far more careful, sending an awkward simple towards Purpled. “Where the fuck did you guys get a sailboat?” He said instead. Ranboo was rich but his parents weren’t sailboat types, not unless it came in a champagne glass.

Behind him, Tommy tackled Tubbo. “Fuck you’re wet?” He said and then there was an odd hissing sound and Tubbo tumbled to the ground, perfectly dry. Purpled couldn’t help how his

eyes widened a bit, what had happened there?

“It belongs to Techno, he loaned it to us to look for you.” Ranboo said, pointing at the boat. Another person was easily climbing down the side, into their own rowboat. Purpled frowned.

“Who the fuck is Techno?” Tubbo said, beating him to it. But Purpled agreed. He had never heard of someone named Techno and their island was small as fuck. He knew everyone here, even the tourists.

“Oh, he’s Wilbur’s brother.” Tommy said. Tubbo froze and Purpled stiffened, alarms blaring in his head even before Tubbo spoke. He was already on edge from the fear response in his system. “Wilbur’s seasick and hiding in the cabin though like a little bitch.”

“Tommy.” Tubbo said, his breath coming short and panicked. His words were garbled and quick. “Wilbur tried to kill me. He’s one of them, the mer, he was going to drown me. He knows what we are.”

Purpled turns to the boat. In the distance, he thinks he can see shadows in the waves. Four get on the boat and four get off of it but two never see the last one go. Techno shades his eyes, blood red staring them down as his rowboat hits the beach. They’d never make it to Dogchamp, he’s between them and the boat and Purpled can’t shake the feeling that he’s planned it like that.

“Run.” Purpled snaps, pushing Ranboo.

And they bolt up the beach.

Chapter End Notes

And yes, I did tweak the rules slightly about getting wet from the TV show. I’ll elaborate more in a later chapter, but it takes a bit more water than a few drops to fully turn a mer (well, an adult at least).

Who do you think electric blue and green is?

The Siren Effect

Chapter Notes

That feeling when you get trapped on an island with Techno hunting you down

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo was not having a good time right now.

Their heart was thudding up against his ribs like it was trying to break them and with each step, he was struggling to pull in enough air. It felt like his feet were catching on everything, vines, bushes, loose stone. He'd gotten smacked in the face with a branch, twice.

Ranboo didn't run. Like, much at all. It was one of the things he accepted for himself. Maybe a short sprint every now or then, but that was short and usually through like buildings and stuff. Paved road was his jam.

He ran away from his problems but usually his problems weren't quite so fucking fast.

Because holy fuck, Techno had to be some kind of athlete.

Over his own heartbeat, he could almost hear the quick thud of footsteps through the undergrowth behind him. Ranboo nearly stumbled, but a warm hand around his wrist yanked him back up and along.

Tommy. He ran with single minded focus, hand practically dragging Ranboo along when he tripped. Ahead, he could see Purpled's violet hoodie through the undergrowth, following Tubbo. He was the hardest to see and for one moment, Ranboo cursed his fashion choices. Even the maid outfit would be better than this. Nobody told him how hard it was to run through a forest with a suit on.

Something in his chest settled somehow at seeing them all, an automatic headcount all filled and accounted for. It had been awful not knowing where Tubbo was and then Purpled brushing them off.

Well, not everything was accounted for.

He chanced a glance over his shoulder, staring wide eyed at the trees behind them. For a moment, he wondered if they had lost him, or maybe Techno had gone in a different direction to cut them off. But no, there was a flicker of pink through the trees. Ranboo faced forward, just in time to get whacked in the face with yet another branch. Yep. This was his life now.

Fuck. How long could they keep this up? Another mile? Maybe two? Where were they even supposed to go at this point?

Techno knew where they were, in fact, they even told him they were going to the island. And unlike Ranboo or even Tommy now, his speed didn't seem to be waning. But Ranboo kept his mouth shut right because how was he supposed to tell them they were screwed? At least while it felt like someone was sucking the air in his lungs out with a vacuum.

Right. Fuck. What did he remember about the island? Fucking nothing, his memory sucked and Ranboo cursed that. There was that town- no that was gone and the reenactment piece was over? He was pretty sure it was?

There was that-

What was it? Ranboo wracked his brains. Something about a friend. His friend? No, parent's friend. They did something. Yeah. He had to see it. It was something that could help? A boat? No.

A house! That's the bitch! There was the old house! It was broken down but he was pretty sure some of the upper areas might let them pass and keep Techno out.

"Head." He wheezed through a tight throat, hoping that Tommy understood. "Towards the building. Broken one."

Tommy made a noise of what he hoped was understanding but might also be a swear, veering on their path. Ranboo was relieved to see Purpled and Tubbo quickly changed course to follow them. But worse, was the flicker of pink that stayed firmly on their trail.

They would only have one shot at this. If they tripped or the house wasn't right-

Ranboo was, uh, not very confident on their chances of making it back to the boat. Like, at all. They were fucked, honestly. If Ranboo could hold Tommy down, he had no problem thinking that Techno could probably bench press them.

It was a massive relief when they broke through the trees and saw the derelict structure. It had only been half built before being abandoned. Some flooring, partial roof, and walls though much of it could have been eroded away by nature. Tarps still waved in the breeze and scaffolding covered some sides of the building.

Ranboo had always kind of wondered why it had been left behind. He had dim memories of someone boasting that they were going all out for this. And yet, it had crumbled.

They darted through the house, kicking aside the remnants of parties in the past. Shattered bottles and metal cans and Ranboo winced at the crunch beneath his shoes. It was somehow colder and darker in here, and occasionally he could see old tools left behind. Probably tossed around by parties.

It was like everyone just dropped everything and left. Wires still hung from the ceiling, a sheet rock pallet on the floor. But more glaring was what was missing.

Metal rods twisted where walls should have been. The stairs were missing, the route to the upper levels completely blocked. Ranboo's eyes widened. How were they supposed to go up

them? Upstairs would be safer, it would be harder for Techno to reach them up there.

It was to one of the scaffolding that Tommy pulled him. “Climb, bitch.” Tommy snapped, hoping up on the first rung. Though it was metal, it creaked and rattled ominously under Tommy’s weight and Ranboo eyed it uncertainly.

Look, he knew this place would be a good place to escape from Techno but that didn’t mean he wasn’t nervous about trusting that stuff himself.

“I think I might just die.” Ranboo said, backing away slowly. Purpled ran past him, speed climbing up the rungs. Even more ominous creaking. We love to hear it. “It’ll be so much more peaceful than falling and breaking my neck. Yup. That’s what I’m gonna do.”

“Less talking and more climbing.” Tubbo said, grabbing Ranboo’s arms as he sprinted past and dragging him to the scaffolding. “If you don’t, I’ll kill you before Techno can!”

It was probably a lie. But maybe probably and Ranboo had seen Tubbo’s doodles of bombs in his notebook. He climbed.

Hoo boy, this was way worse than he thought it was going to be. He didn’t weigh a lot, the doctors always used words like lanky and high metabolism. But the metal felt ready to break underneath his hands. He freaked and shook and it didn’t help that one of the rugs rattled loosely under his hands as he climbed.

And of course, that when he heard a loud crunch and rattling behind him. Techno was here.

Ranboo climbed faster, scrambling to get up the metal. He couldn’t help it. He glanced over his shoulder.

Techno looked pissed. His ruby red eyes glowed in the darkness as he stormed over. “Stop!” He roared. And oh fuck, he was close. Ranboo scrambled the last few rungs, seeing that Tubbo had already reached the top level. Purpled and Tommy were peering down at him.

It was Tommy’s half curse that warned him. Ranboo let out a strangled shriek as a warm hand wrapped around his ankle, yanking him down. It was only his iron grip on the bar that saved him from being yanked straight down.

“Get off of there kid or I’ll break your ankle.” Techno rumbled. Ranboo made a strange wheezing noise as Techno’s hand tightened around his ankle. The metal creaked under his hands, a vivid reminder of how precarious his position was.

“Please don’t, I like my bones.” He whispered, eyes wide as he stared down. “They’re my best feature.”

He glanced up, hoping the others would be there but it was just Tommy, staring down at him with wide eyes. Where was Purpled and Tubbo? Had they abandoned him already? “Come down or I’ll break his ankle and start going through the rest of his bones.” Techno threatened.

“You fucking wouldn’t!”

“I think he would.” Ranboo said, his voice beginning to strain with pain because ow, Techno’s grip was starting to hurt. And not just his ankle, a steady pain was throbbing through his hands and arms as he clung to the scaffolding like a monkey. Something told him, a steady deep seated knowledge he had in chest, that Techno would kill him if he fell. They weren’t friends (podmates), there would be no mercy.

“Fucking bitch! Coward!” Tommy yelled down. “I’ll fucking fight you!”

“Come down here and try, pup.” Techno said. His voice became more coaxing. “You’ve been out of the nest long enough. It’s not safe out here.”

But Ranboo really didn’t want to die here, it would be so awkward and he hasn’t even picked out his last words yet! Tommy would make him the most embarrassing tombstone possible, he knew it in his bones.

He tried to heave himself up, straining to pull and ignore Techno’s huff of amusement. He didn’t get far at all. One of those strange chirping sounds was building in his chest again, stress making him feel like he was going to explode.

“Ranboo! Dodge!” Ranboo had a split second moment where he wondered how exactly he was supposed to do that. And then he flinched as shrapnel suddenly came crashing down from above, trying to flatten himself to the scaffolding. Bottles, a wrench, an old bucket bounced off his shoulder and made him wince.

But Techno let go, cursing as he had to take a step back from the shrapnel rain.

He doesn’t think he’s ever moved that fast in his life. He could have set land speed records with how fast he scrambled up the scaffolding. Tommy grabbed him as soon as he got close enough, pulling him through. Ranboo slithered out with a soft oof, flopping on his belly. His ankle throbbed with pain.

“You can’t stay up there forever.” Techno called up. Tommy made an odd growling sound, chivvying Ranboo off the floor and herding him to one of the less broken down areas, further away. But he could still catch the next part. “Turn yourselves over and we’ll let your friends go.”

Tubbo looked up with a tired smile as they walked closer. His hands were dusty and he was leaning against Purpled’s shoulder who looked like he wanted to be anywhere but here. Ranboo flopped down heavily. Sitting felt so good right now.

“Well, this was a clusterfuck.” Purpled drawled, tucking further into his violet hoodie. “But he’s right, we can’t stay up here forever.”

“Silence! Why are you here anyways?” Tommy asked. Ranboo looked up as well. He had also been curious about that. “Last I checked, you were being a massive bitch and kicking us off your boat! And now you’re fucking here! Did you help kidnap Tubbo?”

Purpled bristled. “Fuck off.” He said. “I went on a ride in my boat to clear my head and found him getting chased by a whale.”

Ranboo squinted at him, noting the faint red of his cheeks. That was a pretty suspicious story, why would Purpled go back on the water so quickly? Without Punz?

“A likely story-”

“No, as weird as it is, I can vouch for that. I was getting chased by some Mer and a whale.” Tubbo said, yawning. “He’s not working for them or he would have given me up instead of rescuing me. There’s no way I could have made it out of there alone.”

“Plus, you’ve seen them right?” Purpled rolled his eyes at Ranboo, Tubbo and Tommy’s confused looks. “They hate humans. One of them threatened to kill and I know he would have gone through with it. That’s a fact. And then Wilbur had his whole thing with Tubbo which I’m guessing was human related?”

“Yeah.” Tommy said and Ranboo never thought he would see Tommy look small but somehow, he did. “What the fuck was that about? Why did you say that Wilbur had tried to kill you? And why did you disappear?”

“They’re connected.” Tubbo said, tilting his head back. “I don’t- I don’t remember a huge part of the beginning. I remember feeling like I had to go somewhere and not wake anyone else up. The beach part was clearer because it was cold and I think the uncomfortableness started to wake me up. But it felt like, I dunno, a dream? It didn’t feel quite real. And then I saw Wilbur in the water, with the tail and fins and he was fucking huge and he told me that he was going to kill me because he didn’t like how I hung around you. He didn’t seem quite certain of it himself but he had a lot of fun telling me how he was going to kill me and use it as an opportunity to get closer to you and no one would ever really know what happened.”

And the worst part was that Ranboo could see it. He could see how the whole plan would have worked. If Tubbo had disappeared, not even they would have connected it to secret ocean mermaids. Tubbo would have been just another statistic and Ranboo’s lived on the island for a long time. He knows how many people have vanished in these waters.

He wonders now, how many were killed by the Mer.

“Never.” Tommy swore. “I would have fucking killed him, burned his bones, and danced on his fucking grave.”

“I know. But when he dragged me into the water and the transformation kicked in, he stopped.” Tubbo said thoughtfully. “I screamed and that’s when Schlatt and Quackity, mers from another group I think, kidnapped me. The whole transformation thing really killed the murder plot. I don’t know quite what they want or if they’re telling the truth, but I don’t think they want to kill us.”

“That still leaves us with a problem.” Purple pointed out. He motioned between him and Ranboo, lowering his voice. “They nearly killed us. They hunted us through the ocean, nearly killed me, and Techno would have chased us down if we hadn’t gotten here in time.”

Ranboo got his meaning right away. Somehow, they knew what Tommy was before. But that same system didn’t extend to him or Purpled. It sounded like none of the mer were aware that

they were mer as well. But on the other hand, that sounded like they'd lose the protection that came with them knowing. Wilbur and Techno seemed plenty okay with killing them.

He had thought the vibes had been weird on the boat. Wilbur and Techno had been nice but it was party nice. Like the socialites at his parents' parties who didn't really care but were happy to fake it to your face. They smiled at Tommy but he had been on edge the entire time thinking he was crazy for feeling like one of them was about to go for his throat.

But could they tell them? It honestly didn't seem safer. Tubbo got chased by a whale apparently. And they didn't even know what the mer really wanted from them. Could be blood sacrifices. Could be nothing. Could they risk it?

"Fuck, and we're on a deadline. I dunno if Wilbur has any shitty powers but if we wait up here too long, then we're going to have to deal with both of these bitches." Tommy said. Ranboo nodded. "I vote we fight them."

"Haha, no." Ranboo said instantly, shaking his head so fast he made himself dizzy. Fight Technoblade? Fuck no. "Did you see him on the boat? He lifted the anchor without even using a machine. He'd snap me like a twig."

"Everything can snap you like a fucking twig if it tries hard enough." Tommy protested, waving his hands. "I could take him! Easy, just let me at him and I'll absolutely destroy him without a sweat, no problem at all."

"I'm with Ranboo, you would in fact die and it'll be funny for all of five seconds until Tubbo drags us into a suicidal avenging attempt." Purpled drawled, folding his arms. OO, Ranboo hadn't thought of that. Tubbo looked mutinous at Tommy's suggestion. "That's even saying that you get to fight him, he could just kidnap you and we'll be back to square one. We need to get back to the boat."

"And then what?" Tubbo asked, looking at his hands. "We both knew on the boat that the only reason the chase lasted for so long was because they were toying with us."

"We might have a better chance." Purpled countered. "We're working on the assumption that Wilbur was the one who distracted the other mer, right? So, either they're still fighting and he and Techno would be distracted dealing with them, or they're not fighting and we're back to square one but at least we have a way off the island."

Ranboo let out a thoughtful hum. "But how are we even supposed to get back to the water?" He said. The ominous rattling from downstairs was beginning to quiet. "We don't have a head start, there's no way we'd make it back to the beach."

"Pool." Tubbo said thoughtfully. He lowered his voice leaning in. "We change when we hit water, right? We're close to the beach, there's gotta be some freshwater or saltwater pools. If we can trick Techno into one, that'll keep him away from the beach and we'll be able to get back to the beach, easy."

Everyone looked at Ranboo. "I think there's a waterfall pool that way?" He said, pointing vaguely to the left. "They talked about it at the party, maybe, and I think a couple drunken

teenagers talked about daring each other to jump into there. If we go that way, we'll hit the top of it."

Tubbo nodded. "That'll work." He said. "Me and Tommy will take point on this, he's less likely to kill us. Whoever does will jump across and we'll try to push him down the waterfall."

Ranboo didn't argue but he wanted to. He counted as a mer too, he should be able to help them! But there was a part of him that was terrified to reveal that to Techno. "We should be able to get down some of the scaffolding of the outside but he's going to be on us, fast."

"I can handle that." Tommy said, looking more confident than Ranboo felt. "We run and juke him into the pond."

"This plan sucks." Purpled said with a huff. "When do we start?"

It takes them a bit longer to hash out the details but Ranboo can't quite focus on the words. His mind is drifting and he keeps returning to the rattling the floor underneath them. It's quiet. Why has it gone quiet?

He doesn't like it.

"Guys." He said, cutting through the current conversation. "We need to go right now. Like, right now and right away."

"What the fuck-"

It's the eyes that give him away. With the dawning horror of someone in a horror movie who knows they won't be the final girl, Ranboo sees two eyes appear in the shadowy recesses of the other side of the ruin upstairs. Ruby red and terrifyingly familiar. And in the back of his fishbrain, he goes absolutely fucking nuts.

"Surprise, pups."

They bolt upright, scattering as Techno easily pulls himself into the upstairs. "I told you that wouldn't stop me." He said and Ranboo's ankle screamed as he tried to run and he almost felt Techno's eyes go to him.

Easy prey, the back of his mind whimpers. Injured prey is easy prey.

A bottle shatters against Techno's head, stopping him mid stride. "Over here, motherfucker! Stupid blade ass bitch! Everyone knows that Techno music sucks and is outdated!" Tommy screamed. And hllllly shit, Techno is fast. He covers the ground between him and Tommy in what feels like seconds and Tommy doesn't even better to scream more insults before jumping off through one of the missing walls, ignoring Techno's bellow of rage.

A hand grabs his upper arm. "Get moving." Purpled commanded, dragging him a few feet before Ranboo got his feet under him and started jogging. Tubbo had already jumped down, a determined set to his face. "He's fine, just go."

“I don’t think you’re supposed to do that.” Ranboo said as they made it to one of the ledges. He could see Tommy running towards the trees, Techno just a few feet behind him. Tubbo bolted past Techno like a squirrel on crack, swinging wide to follow Tommy.

“Stop thinking, it’s survivable.” Purpled said, rolling his eyes and Ranboo yelped as he was pushed off.

His first thought hitting the ground and rolling was ow, I’m still alive! The second thought was OW. Fish brain and him had a rare moment of agreement. They should stay right here. Right here was comfortable and moving made their feet hurt.

And then he heard the slow thud of footsteps and that wonderful agreement was stymied by seeing Purpled running away. They had agreed he and Purpled would run a slightly different direction, meet up just before the beach, and get to Dogchamp together.

But something made him hesitate. And judging by the way Purpled was changing course, he agreed. (Pod stays together).

Ranboo pulled himself up, sprinting off after Techno and the two. This close, he could hear the roared threats. And worse, the slightly quieter promises. Stuff that didn’t make sense but made the fish part of him shake.

“Rip your tail fins... cover your eyes... lash you down with rocks-”

Techno had officially moved up a whole new rung in Ranboo’s terror measurement because holy fuck. This was terrifying. Ranboo forced himself to continue through the trees, slowly eating up the ground between them. Purpled started to ease off slightly but Ranboo stayed set. Maybe it was adrenaline. Maybe just stupidity.

Through the forest ahead of him, he could see Techno following Tubbo and Tommy through the trees. They stay just out of reach, but only just and for a moment, Ranboo was terrified that he had been wrong. That he had pointed out the wrong path and there was no waterfall, that the dull roar in his ears was his heart and not the waterfall.

And then they broke out into the clearing.

It had never looked so beautiful. Mist clouded the area as water fell over the short cliff. Tubbo bolted through first, clearing the stream with a swift leap, stumbling through the other side. Techno was directly on their trail and this would be perfect.

Tommy jumped. And stumbled, slamming into Tubbo’s back and taking them to the ground. Leaving them both defenseless. They wouldn’t make it up in time, Ranboo knew this. Techno was about to jump and Ranboo couldn’t-

Not his friends.

Ignoring the scream in the back of his head, the instinctive fear, Ranboo pushed everything he had into sprinting the last few feet, slamming into Techno’s back like a torpedo fueled by bad decisions.

A fun thing about weightlessness. It really gave you time to consider how badly you fucked up. Ranboo looked up into Purpled's horrified eyes. And then he hit the water.

If it wasn't for the instinctive change, he would have choked. Instead he spasm, fear fear fear rushing into his head as he began to sink. He wanted out. He needed to be out. He couldn't- it was everywhere and he was sinking and the shore was so far away why was it so far away he was scared and it was so deep so so deep how much water did you need to drown?

He wanted- he keened, wanting Tubbo and Tommy and Purpled here. They needed to be here. He was scared and he needed them. His breath came in short, hitched gasps as he panicked, clawing at the water.

"Calm." Arms wrapped around him and Ranboo clung to them blinding, trying to flail towards the service but any raft in a storm. "Breath with me, pup. You're alright. I've got you here."

Ranboo keened again and they answered in a low rumble that made him slump slightly, fins still fluttering. That didn't sound like his hatchmates but it sounded like safety and he needed to be safe. It was scary in this water. He felt so strangely small in their arms, Tubbo and Tommy and Purpled were all much closer to his height. Who was this?

"There we go." They purred and he felt oddly bubbly. He made them proud. He had never made many people proud before. It was a nice feeling. "Good pup. Just needed a reminder."

Ranboo twisted around, trying to see the stranger and met blood red eyes full of wonder. And darkness. Techno leaned in closer, idly beginning to pull him deeper. "That explains why you ran to me in the library." He said and his grin was wicked. "You knew you needed a protector."

He glanced back at the surface, muttering darkly. "It's not safe enough here. Not enough cover. Need to get you back safe. And a caregiver because I'm not good at this."

If Ranboo's lungs didn't feel like they were being held in a vice grip, he might have said something intelligent here. Maybe a swear. Instead what came out was. "Aagahaaga."

Techno rolled his eyes. There was a splash of water above them and Techno's arms tightened. "Bitch!" Tommy screamed, cannoning into Ranboo's stomach. Ow. What was that for! He was the victim here! Tommy clawed and bit at Techno's arms which was marginally more helpful. "Let him go! Bitch!"

"Heh- no, are you serious?" Techno said. He made that weird rumbling sound again and Ranboo felt the weird wave of calm roll across him even as he fumbled to try and escape. It didn't linger as much this time which was promising. He didn't look to be affected by Ranboo's attempts at all which definitely made him feel normal and not like he was on the verge of Panic Attack 2.0, now with double the Panic and Repression. "Bruh. Most pups calm down at this point."

Tommy screamed and went for the eyes. See, that was what Ranboo liked about him. He was great for when you needed someone to careen into bad decisions with. Techno released one

arm, using it to fend Tommy off and Ranboo took the opportunity to start trying to wriggle out, tentatively clawing at Techno's arms.

What was weirder was that when he moved, fish brain protested.

Which?? Was so unfair?

He needed to go and help Tommy but no, fish brain told him that he shouldn't panic. He was safe, in fact, he was in the safest place in the world. He should chill out and vibe. It was content to flop in Techno's arms.

He reminded them that Techno had threatened to break their bones. It seemed a bit more unsure at that fact.

"Philza owes me for this." Techno said as he captured Tommy's wrist. Tommy screeched, twisting and trying to pull away. That broke the spell. Hatchmate was in danger, ergo, he was in danger. And that was just bad over all.

Ranboo screeched back and the temperature dropped hard. The water crackled and Techno let out a snarl that went straight to the fear receptors, pulling away as his scales frosted over. Tommy moved like a rattlesnake on speed, snagging Ranboo and bolting for the surface.

He surfaced with a gasp, feeling Tommy yank him towards shore. Ranboo followed, trying to scramble to where Tubbo and Purpled were waiting, Tubbo pacing across the shore.

They were so close.

Until Tommy swore, arm jerking to the side, dipping back below the surface. Ranboo bit back on the bone deep fear that came first, this time trying to drag Tommy. His and Techno's eyes met through the water.

"Tommy! Burn him, you dumbass!" Purpled yelled. Ranboo yelped as the water temperature suddenly climbed, quickly going from chilly to ow, fuck, this is why nanny said you shouldn't touch the stove. And suddenly they were shooting forward. Ranboo let out a choked out yelp as he hit the shore, nearly bouncing off before Purpled was there, carefully dragging him onto shore without touching the water. Beside him, Tubbo had grabbed Tommy, pulling the other onto drier land.

Ranboo slumped in relief, feeling dry air pass over him and the water evaporate.

"Never again." He whispered, rolling over and staring up. Thank fuck, his sunglasses and mask was still on. Purpled stared down at him.

"Throw him back in." He said. But he reached down and pulled Ranboo to stand anyway. "That was such a bad idea."

"Thanks, I got it from you guys." Ranboo said chirpily as he adjusted his sunglasses. His heart was still thudding hard against his ribs.

“Pups.” Techno said and Ranboo was unfortunately reminded that he was still here. Ughhhh. The pink Mer had surfaced, glaring at them. Tommy took a step forward, trying to block them from view. It didn’t work but Ranboo appreciated the effort.

“Fuck you bitch. Now, you’re fucking trapped and we’re going to go and there’s nothing you can do it. Be sad. I bet you have no wives.” Tommy snapped. Techno growled.

“Get back here.” He pressed, reaching out and beginning to pull himself on the shore.

“Fun fact, crocodiles are really fast out of water. Also fun fact, I have no clue if mer are. Let’s go!” Tubbo said, turning and bolting back into the trees. Ranboo hesitated for just a half second but turned and ran in after them.

He didn’t think he would ever forget the way Techno looked at him. Rage and possessiveness at war in bloody red eyes. It sent a shiver up his spine, hands coming up to block out a strange barking sound from behind that made him flinch hard.

It was less of a run and more of a stagger through the woods. None of them said it, but they were all worn and exhausted as the adrenaline slowly began to drain away. Ranboo was listing slightly as he walked, his ankle aching. It hurt. A lot.

“We’ll need to get that bandaged when we get home, Boo.” Tubbo said with a yawn, looking down at Ranboo’s ankle. “I don’t think it’s broken, but I dunno if the mer transformation could have hurt it more somehow.”

Ranboo nodded, too tired to speak as they pushed through the trees. Just another step and he could sit down on the boat. Just a bit further. Then he could rest.

They stepped out onto the clear beach where Dogchamp was.

“Wow, you beat Techno?” Wilbur said and his grin was murder as he leaned forward on the edge of the boat. His tail flicked, spraying water in the air. In the distance, the water roiled with what Ranboo dearly hoped was dolphins. “I’m impressed. Mad, but impressed.”

Chapter End Notes

Ranboo: *panics*

Techno: MURDER

Mer Pup!Ranboo: *panics*

Techno: A child. My child.

Tommy: no he fuCKING ISN’T-

Shipwrecked

Chapter Notes

A semi fitting episode title for once. We'll close enough, Eyyyy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy let out a string of swears that would make a sailor blush and Wilbur wheeze with laughter. But secretly, in Ranboo's opinions, the spring of insults Purpled used were far more creative. And Terrifying.

Where had Purpled learned to skin people alive?? And then hide the body in an undersea volcanic vent?

"-Your mother was a salmon who died halfway up the stream and you're a necrotic egg. There's blobfish out there who are prettier than you." Purpled spat, only held back by Ranboo grabbing his arm and digging in his heels. *"Get the fuck off of Dogchamp."*

"What are you going to do if I don't?" Wilbur said and there was a flash of too sharp teeth in his smile as he leaned forward. "Are you going to come over here and make me?"

Purpled snarled, lunging forward and Ranboo yelped as his arm was harshly yanked out of his grip, diving forward to catch the other's hand before the mer killed him or he strangled Wilbur with his bare hands. Not that Ranboo would mind the latter because wow, violence isn't okay but these mer suck. But mostly because there was an unfairly high chance Wilbur would kill Purpled instead.

Tubbo reacted faster, lunging forward to grab Purpled by the arm and pull him back. "He wants you to attack him." He said in a low voice and Ranboo caught on, grabbing Purpled's other hand.

"Good, I want to." Purpled said, violet eyes laser focused on Wilbur. Ranboo wasn't sure he had ever seen the other this mad before and he had been there for The Great Tuna Incident.

"He's not fucking worth it." Tommy scoffed. And wow, it was kind of weird how fast Wilbur just kind of... flipped? When he saw Tommy and Tubbo? Ranboo couldn't put his finger on it. But when Wilbur was looking at Tommy and Tubbo, his grin seemed softer somehow. The flashes of teeth were strangely reassuring. When he looked at Purpled and Ranboo, it looked like he was debating how to kill them.

Like Techno in the lagoon, Ranboo thought.

At the house, Techno had been ready to kill him, slowly and painfully if it meant Tubbo and Tommy would give themselves up. His ankle still hurt when he put weight on it, a sharp

starburst of pain with every shift. But the moment he had fallen into the water-

“You knew you needed a protector.”

If it hadn't been for Tommy, he knows Techno wouldn't have let him escape the water. But why the giant shift? What changed? What- the pup thing? Made mer so obsessed with them?

And, Ranboo thought, swallowing hard when he saw Wilbur shift forward with that predatory grin as the boat creaked, what were they supposed to do about it? He wasn't going to give Tommy and Tubbo up to protect himself.

“No, no, let him fight.” Wilbur said with a flippant wave, flicking his curls out of his eyes.

“No need to stop him on my account. I'm always up for a bit of fresh meat.”

“Don't listen to him.” Ranboo could hear Tubbo whisper to Purpled. The other was still pulling at their grip, nearly leaning forward. “It's too risky to go after him like this. We'll get him off of your boat but there's no way you can reach him before...”

There was no way any of them could reach him. Wilbur had pulled the boat away from shore, tauntingly close but too far to reach or jump to. If any of them tried, they'd definitely stumble or fall in the water. Either they would transform or Wilbur would use his reach in the water to kill them first.

A trap for the one Wilbur knew were mer and a death sentence for the ones he thought were humans. If Purpled tried to attack him, there was no way he wouldn't transform and the ocean was a lot bigger than the pool.

But they needed that boat to get off the island.

Tommy scoffed. “Of course, you have to resort to fucking cheating to win.” Tommy said. “Can't play fair because you know we'd beat your hipster ass so you decide to cheat and pretend like you're better when you're not.”

“Aw, Tommy, don't be that way! You were so sweet when we were exploring the island shops.” Wilbur cooed and Ranboo got the interesting sight of Tommy paling with shock at the same time he turned red with rage. “Wilburrrr, look at these discs, Wilbur you have okay music tastes. What happened to that Tommy?”

“You tried to kill Tubbo!” Tommy screeched. “You were going to kill him and lied to my fucking face! You did lie to my face pretending you wanted to help us and then your bitch ass brother tried to kill Ranboo and Purpled.”

That was true. Ranboo had the possibly sprained, hopefully not broken ankle to prove it. Purpled had calmed down slightly, not pulling against his grip anymore and Ranboo took the time to shift his weight off, hiding a wince. That was going to hurt in the morning. No, wait. It hurts now. Owwww.

Why did mortal flesh have to come with so many problems?

“Okay, look, I know I tried to kill you and I’m very sorry about that.” Wilbur said, looking at Tubbo. “But, at the time I didn’t know you were a mer pup and I wouldn’t have done it if I had known.”

“Did you- Did you just blame my near death on me not telling you?” Tubbo said, blinking quickly and Ranboo used his other hand to grab Tubbo’s wrist. He really hoped Tommy didn’t try to attack Wilbur because he didn’t have any hands left. “You really did, didn’t you? Absolutely abysmal, you admitted to trying to kill me but adding a ‘but’ to your apology!”

“Classless.” Tommy hissed, looking viciously delighted. But Ranboo’s eyes kept going back to Wilbur.

“So, what, if you had killed me on land and didn’t know, it would have been my fault?” Tubbo retorted. “I could have died.”

“I would have figured it out.” Wilbur said but that argument sounded weak even to Tubbo. He coughed, trying again. “If you got into that much risk, you’d protect yourself, even if you are pretending not to recognize the need for it right now.”

“Bullshit.” Tubbo rebutted. Ranboo frowned.

He looked sorry but it wasn’t quite right. Less like he was sorry and more like he was sorry he got caught, an expression Ranboo was far too familiar with, having seen it on his parents as they went on vacations instead of business trips. He really didn’t believe he had done something wrong, it was there in how his sorrowful frown quirked up slightly, the slight fond? Exasperation.

Except for when Tubbo pointed out the fact about land. And then he looked actually guilty, his eyes darting to the side before the confident facade came back up.

He didn’t know why. But unlike Tubbo and Tommy, he was sure. The mer wouldn’t hurt them, at least Tommy and Tubbo who they knew were also mer.

“We don’t want any trouble.” Ranboo said, tugging on Purpled’s hand to try and pull him back. He risked a glance back, trying to remember how fast it had taken Purpled to dry off the first time. How much time did they have left before Techno arrived?

“Funny, human, I do.” Wilbur said, his voice dropping into a hiss. “In fact, I would love to make a bit of trouble right now and I will unless both of the pups leave with me. Now.”

Ranboo couldn’t help blinking. WOW, Wilbur really hadn’t learned anything from trying to murder Tubbo, did he? Absolutely nothing at all. In one ear and out the other. He wasn’t going to reveal himself but both Tubbo and Tommy had told him they would never forgive him for touching their friends.

And he thought he had a bad memory.

Tommy barked a laugh. “And why should we listen to you? You’re in the water and we’re over there.” He jeered. “Fish don’t have legs. Lame.”

“You need the boat.” Wilbur pointed out with a lazy grin. The wood creaked slightly as he leaned on it and Purpled looked like he was a half second from revealing himself if it meant getting a chance at murder. Ranboo eyed him worriedly.

“If you leave my boat with him-

“He only wants it because Tommy and Tubbo are here.” Ranboo pointed out. Purpled side eyed him. He could almost hear the other seething with rage. “We can move to a different area and figure out something. But you can’t go into the water with him.

“We can go without.” Tubbo said, starting to take a half step back. “Good talking to you but I think we need to fold the dishes, alright guys, Purpled if you don’t walk back with us right now, I’m burning Dogchamp.”

Purpled rounded on Tubbo. “You wouldn’t.” He snarled.

Tubbo tilted his chin up stubbornly. “I would. We can pool our resources and get you a new boat but you’re not- getting yourself killed to make a point.”

Ranboo hoped Wilbur had noticed that slight hitch in Tubbo’s words. It was good to have his theory confirmed but definitely terrifying after having it confirmed through Techno that he would have killed Ranboo. Out of all of them, he and Purpled were most likely to be killed.

But it was a bluff. And that terrified Ranboo because it had to be a bluff. Tubbo was scary smart sometimes, but even he couldn’t magic up a boat out of nowhere. And if they tried to swim for it, they were done for. There was no way that they would all make it. But what choice did they have?

Maybe they could look around the house again. Ranboo didn’t remember anything being there but that didn’t mean there couldn’t be, his memory kind of sucked sometimes. He started tugging on Purpled, forcing him to take a step back and then another.

”Stop.”

Against his will, his legs froze. Wilbur didn’t so much say the word as he sang it, something that seemed to reverberate and fill the air with power. Beside him, Purpled, Tommy, and Tubbo had all frozen as well.

“That’s much better, don’t you think?” Wilbur sang. Ranboo tried to force himself to move but nothing happened. It was like his mind was completely disconnected from his body, the ability to control himself too connected to listening to Wilbur’s music. Wilbur hummed, tapping his chin. “Now, what should I do first? On one hand, I’d love to see Tommy and Tubbo’s pretty little scales again. On the other hand, you are due for a punishment for being so rude.”

Ranboo’s blood turned to ice and he tried to take comfort in the weight of Purpled’s hand in his own, as silly as it was.

Not Tommy and Tubbo, he thought quietly. Not Purpled either. If any of them reached the water, they were gone. And he couldn't let that happen. Ranboo, as his parents would say, was a selfish person. He couldn't let them go.

Tubbo made a soft stuttery sound but Wilbur just hummed louder, cutting it off as soon as it had appeared. "Oh, are you offering yourself up?" He said, eyes glowing with glee. "Hmmm. I'm spoiled for choice here. Mer pups or lunch, not that I don't plan on both in the end."

"Eenie, meenie, minie, mo-" He was looking at Tommy. No. He wasn't going to let that happen. Ranboo threw everything he had against the song in his head.

Wilbur's song might be loud but Ranboo's eternal mental screaming was far louder.

Unfortunately instead of being a brave challenge, Ranboo just fell to the ground with a soft thump and laid there like a slug. Face down in the sand, he questioned his life choices, not for the first time that day.

"Oh, come on, I was having fun." Wilbur complained and it was unfair how it sounded like normal singing. When he sang, it kind of sounded weird but Wilbur? Perfect. Buttery smooth. If he wasn't going to kill Ranboo, it would have been kind of nice. Another stuttery sound and Wilbur hushed them like one would a child. "Quiet. He practically volunteered himself and even covered himself with my favorite condiment."

Favorite condiment???? What did that mean??

"Come over here to me." It wasn't addressed to him and yet, it was at the same time. Somehow, Ranboo knew it was meant for him. He felt completely out of the loop as his hands pushed himself up until he could stand up, swaying slightly. He tried to fight it but it was sharper, a losing battle as his body slowly staggered forward.

Fish brain only chirped, terrified.

Wilbur slid off the boat as he drew closer, coming up to the sand. Up close, he could see even clearer the terrible excitement in his eyes. Ranboo wondered what would come first, the water turning him or Wilbur killing him. He'd prefer neither. At the very least, he wanted to know the condiment he was referring to.

"Hold still." Wilbur sang, reaching a clawed hand out of the water towards his neck. "This is going to be painful but only the worst for someone who tries to claim a mer pup."

No, seriously, what was the condiment, Ranboo wanted to know before he died. The only thing he was covered in was-

Someone roared behind him, a deep and feral sound of rage, and Wilbur's eyes went wide. That was all Ranboo saw before something big and pink hurtled past him, body slamming Wilbur away.

And suddenly the music was gone. Ranboo fell to the sand with a gasp as his head was suddenly empty. The strings were cut and he was back on the ground, staring up at the sky and

trying not to shake as terrifying screeching and thrashing filled the air.

“Ranbitch! Are you okay?” Tommy said, leaning over at him. Ranboo stared up at him, eyes wide. Did he look okay? He had just had his mind absolutely blown.

“I think Wilbur considers sand a condiment.” He blurted out and Tommy recoiled. “And I think it’s his favorite condiment and he tried to eat me and-”

“Yup, he’s fucking broken. Up you go. We need to get going while he’s distracted.” Tommy said, roughly yanking Ranboo to his feet. Purpled was far too close to the water, staring into it while Tubbo sprinted back down the beach, carrying a large hooked stick. “Fucking hell, don’t you fucking do that again.”

“I really would rather not.” Ranboo said, his attention drawn past him to the water. Blue and dark pink scales flashed through the water. Techno was attacking Wilbur, he realized. The other was using his speed to outmaneuver Techno, using his smaller size to his advantage but as a fellow lanky person, Ranboo knew someone like Techno could fold him like an accordion.

Tommy dragged him over to Tubbo and Purpled who were working on fishing the boat line out of the water with the stick. Ranboo winced as it bobbed in the water, knocked around by the fighting mer. It was a good thing Purpled had added that rope with a plastic ring on it, in case the lines tying it broke.

Why had Techno attacked Wilbur? Was it because he was trying to hurt Ranboo? Or were they not as good friends or brothers like they said?

“Got it!” Tubbo whisper yelled, pulling hard on the stick as it slipped around the plastic ring. He started pulling the boat back, and Ranboo watched with his heart in his throat.

If Techno or Wilbur looked at them right now...

The boat slid to a stop. Ranboo froze, eyes darting to the writhing fight but no, Techno and Wilbur were still brawling in the water. So, who could it be-

A green mer popped out of the water. “Got it!” He cheered. “Did I do a good job? Am I holding this right?”

“You’re doing just fine, Charlie.” A black and gold mer said, surfacing next to him. Fuck. They had forgotten that the other mer were still here, even if they had been hanging out further away from shore. “Let’s wrap this up quick before Wilbur snaps Techno out of it, as much as I like watching them getting their asses kicked.”

“Why does everyone keep stealing my boat?” Purpled said, eyes looking up to the sky like he was looking for some malevolent god to destroy for this. “Get your claws off of it before you scratch the woodwork, you misbegotten duck-“

“We’re not going to go with you, Quackity.” Tubbo said, chin up. Ranboo nodded quickly. He had a math test on Tuesday, if he missed it, his grade was fucked. And the kidnapping

issue. That was a problem as well.

“You don’t have much of a choice the way I see it, kid.” Someone spoke up. New mer, with shaggy brown hair and blue and black scales. “I’ll even be nice and let your human friends go.”

“Except for the tall one.” Quackity interjected and Ranboo flinched. He shrugged under the other mer’s side eye. “I want to know what’s so good about him that he sent Techno into a frenzy.”

“Nothing.” Ranboo said, shrinking under their looks. Maybe he could just bury himself in the sand. Tommy picked up a rock, looking ready to throw it at Quackity.

“Then we’ll see about that.”

“Come on, you’ll know this’ll lead to nothing. You can’t get past us and can’t reach the boat.” Blue and Black coaxed. “If you wait too long, you’re just going to have to deal with Wil and Techno again and they will kill your human friends. I’m being the good guy here. Come with me, and as soon as you’re in the water, I’ll push the boat over and your friend leaves.”

Tommy glanced at them, making a hand motion that vaguely looked like setting things on fire. A bluff with the insta dry? It had merit. If they could move fast enough, they could all escape before the mer could take them into deeper water, maybe?

That or Tommy wanted to set something on fire. Or was strangling the air. Ranboo wasn’t sure how far he was reading into this.

But Purpled was shaking his head.

“Look, I think we can come to a better deal, Schlatt-“ Tubbo started.

“There is no better deal.” Schlatt interrupted. “There’s only me and my impatience. Do you think you can get out of the bay without one of us stopping you? Without Wil and Techno catching you? It’s over. It’s done. I’m giving you the option to let your friends get out alive.”

Tubbo made an odd hissing sound that made Ranboo strangely infuriated and the mer laugh. “Just-“

“Fuck you.” Tommy said, bristling. “I’m not letting wronguns like you touch Purpled and Ranboo.”

“Tick tock. Or I’ll lose my patience.” Schlatt said with a vicious grin, leaning against the boat. “And you don’t want to know what I’ll do if I lose my patience.”

“We’re going to eat them!” A blue and tan mer popped out of the water, looking way too excited about it.

“Shut up, Conner.”

Ranboo shrank into himself, wishing he could do something, anything. That the ice would come back and freeze the mers into little ice cubes. Or maybe that he knew exactly what to say to get them out of this or he was as deadly as Techno or even just as loud as Tommy could be. But he didn't know what he could do at all. Instead, he just shrank in on himself and wished he could become invisible.

Tubbo and Tommy exchanged looks, on that freaky same wavelength he had seen them used before. Where they didn't say a word but just knew what the other wanted to say.

"We'll go with you." Tubbo said quietly and Ranboo felt his whole world tilt on his axis. Because Tommy should not be quiet and Tubbo should not sound defeated and he shouldn't just stand here clutching Purpled's hand like a lifeline but he felt if he moved, it would all fall apart. "But Purpled and Ranboo go home. They're not involved with this, they only got Techno's attention because they were with us."

"Why should I allow that?" Quackity drawled. He hummed something in what sounded like Spanish. "I've got a bone to pick with Techno."

"Because I'll fucking bite you." Tommy said, baring his teeth. "Bitch."

"Tubbo-" Purpled started but Schlatt made a sharp sound of cutting him off.

"You're not in on this conversation." He dismissed, eyes on Tubbo and Tommy. He was on a time limit too, Ranboo realized. Once Wilbur and Techno stopped fighting, they were going to be trouble for him as well. But how was he supposed to turn that into a plan? Maybe if he-

Tommy stepped forward, slouching slightly and every alarm bell went off in Ranboo's head, the fish brain screaming about Tommy leaving them. And then Tubbo stepped and whoo boy, Ranboo might have broken Purpled's fingers which was okay because he probably broke his.

"There we go." Schlatt said, looking triumphant as he moved closer. Tommy hesitated a half step from the water and Ranboo started to lunge forward.

Only to startle back as something bright and loud whistled past and cracked against Schlatt, causing the mer to howl and dive back under water. Ranboo practically jumped out of his skin. More mini fireballs- no, wait, Ranboo thought dumbly as he blinked after images out of his eyes, Fireworks. That was what was going off.

They rained down on the mer, causing water to ripple as they suddenly scattered and Tubbo had to pull Tommy back before he got sprayed.

"Go!" Someone yelled behind him and then Tommy was diving for the stick and the rope and Ranboo was jerked forward after Purpled, all of them scrambling to get the boat to shore and scrambling into it, flopping in a little pile. The boat rocked, pushing them back into deeper water as Ranboo tried to catch his breath at the bottom of the pile. The motor started with a roar heard over the crackling of fireworks and suddenly they were moving.

There was a howl from behind them, a sound that set his teeth on edge and made him huddle at the bottom of the boat. It was nice down here. Warm with three- no.

Four people pressed against him.

Who invaded our nest, fish brain screamed. Interloper! Drive them out!

Ranboo groaned and rolled over slightly, catching sight of ginger hair and a face he hadn't wanted to see.

Fundy.

"Give me one reason I shouldn't sick Tubbo on you." Tommy said, glaring at the new guy. What was his name- Fundy? Furry? Furry sounded close. "I'll do it! He's vicious!"

"Please don't?" Furry said, his voice going up an octave at the end. Weak. Or smart because Tubbo could be terrifying. He gestured to the water. "You, uh, you do need me. I have the fireworks."

"Speaking of which, what was that about?" Tubbo said, looking far too focused on the fireworks. Tommy made a note to get a new fire extinguisher. The fire had been funny until it torched one of his coke cans. He mourned not getting to taste that sweet caffeine. "They all scattered at the sound."

"Oh, yeah!" Furry said, looking a bit more animated. "It's something I figured out! See, the mer hang out in deeper water a lot and that means they're really adapted to that one spot in terms of noise and light. Loud noises and flashes hurt like hell when they're in their aquatic form."

"Suspicious." Tommy hissed. "That you just knew to show up here."

He gestured at Boob boy and Purpled, seeing them snatch their hands away from each other. Did they just remember they were holding hands. "I'm watching you, Furry."

"Furry-" He spluttered. "My name is Fundy!"

"Same thing."

"No!"

"Oh, you're the ItsFundy guy! From the killer mer account!" Tubbo said. Fundy perked up instantly, nodding.

"Yeah, uh, people think I'm a conspiracy theorist but hey, I know I'm right. Killer mer. Not the best thing to be right about but I'll take it." Fundy said. Tommy stared at him, narrowing his eyes. Suspicious. This man was a wrongun and not just because he was a furry.

"Right, that was terrible! We have no idea why they came after us." Tubbo said, kicking Tommy so he started nodding. Fun trick that they learned. "Really scary! I don't even know why, maybe because we were visiting the island."

"Oh, I already know about the whole pup thing."

There was a soft click as Purpled killed the engine. “Really.” He said silky smooth, and Tommy cracked his knuckles. Fundy was scrawny. He could break all of their bones. Fundy’s eyes went wide.

“No, no, it’s not like that! I’m not with them, I swear! Completely outside presence here!” He scrambled to explain. “I promise, I don’t plan to do anything with the info!”

“Vibes be rancid.” Tommy said, narrowing his eyes. He smelled a liar and he wanted to kick their ass. Tubbo put his arm out, the fake friendliness disappearing.

“Well, that’s abysmal. How did you figure it out then?” He said. “Since you know so much about all of this. If you want to stay on this boat, I suggest you start talking”

“I was at Clay’s party that night.” Fundy said, lowering the firework he was holding. “And I was bored and I don’t even know, just hanging out by the pool. So when Ranboo fell in, I was the only one to see what happened.”

Ranboo groaned, burying his head in his hands. Tommy groaned as well. Now Tubbo was going to say I told you so. He thought nobody had seen!

“I ran over when I realized what was happening but you guys were already gone. I’ve been trying to track you guys down but you kept slipping away.” Fundy said with a shrug. “But when I saw you getting on a boat with... Wilbur and Techno, I realized something was wrong. So, I rented a boat, oh. Oh no. I lost my fucking deposit. Ughhhhh.”

“I’m not turning around.” Purpled’s said, starting the engine again so they glided smoothly forward. Aw. Tommy craved violence.

He still remembered being trapped as (nestmate) Ranboo nearly got murdered. By someone who had talked with him about music, who seemed so kind and funny.

“It’s fine. I can go back with a friend and get them to help me bring it back, I’ll pay the late fee. Just ugh.” Fundy said, slumping back.

“Keep going. I haven’t made a decision yet. Who told you about mer?” Tubbo said. “Don’t think I didn’t notice you use the right term.”

Oh shit, he right. Tommy didn’t even think about it but that’s suspicious. Violence was back on the table. This bitch used the right term even though everyone knew mermaid was the smart term.

“You’re going to make fun of me!”

“Definitely tell them.” Tommy said eagerly. Fundy sighed.

“A long time ago, my mom got, well, involved with a mer and he told her about them.” He said. “And it ended really badly. And she told me all about them in case I needed to protect myself.”

Well, that was vague as fuck. Tommy thought. “Involved?” He prodded. Fundy looked like he wanted to bury his head in his hands.

“Dating.” Tommy whistled. Wow. What the fuck had his mom done to deserve that? All women were queens and deserved better than cannibal mermaids. Except his wives because he knew how to treat ‘em.

“Do you know how we can turn it off?” Ranboo said. He flinched at Tommy’s look. “It’s cool and all, but I didn’t sign up for killer mermaids. It might be safer if we turn back.”

Fuck, he was right. Being a mermaid was way less cooler with those bitches around.

“I have no clue.” Fundy said with a frown. “All I really know is where they live, names, some info I gathered over the years. I don’t even know how this happened, I mean, I’ve seen Purpled and Ranboo in the water before this and nothing happened. But I can try.”

“Don’t you have anything useful?” Tommy said with a groan of disappointment. He was tired of running around and guessing. Things would have been way easier if he knew Wilbur was a killer mermaid before the guy betrayed him.

He didn’t even want to imagine what would have happened if Tubbo hadn’t been able to warn them in time. It would have been fine. He could have kicked their ass. Probably.

“I don’t but I’m ready to look.” Fundy said. He sighed. “Look. I’m really not supposed to be getting involved in this. But if it wasn’t for me, you guys would have been captured and or killed. You don’t have anything to lose by accepting my help.”

But that didn’t mean they had to be happy about it, Tommy thought with a huff.

Tommy looked to Tubbo. He probably knew what to do. The other nodded slowly. “If Purpled and Ranboo don’t disagree, we’ll call this a temporary alliance for now.”

“I have nothing.” Purpled said. Tommy rolled his eyes. He was still a bit mad the fucker had lied about going to the island. “Other than that this was a massive clusterfuck.”

Ranboo was quiet for a long moment, staring at the boat floor. “Fine.” He said. Tommy tapped his knee and he shook his head. Fine, but that wasn’t believable.

“Right.” Fundy let out a relieved sigh. “Let’s swing by my house. I left my books there.”

Chapter End Notes

Wilbur and Schlatt going in for the capture BUT WHATS THIS ITS FUNDY WITH THE STEEL CHAIR-

Techno lost in the sauce.

Also, yes, Wilbur and the mer are being dumb but two pups? Huge deal. Four?
Unthinkable. More on that soon. Congrats to everyone who guessed the mystery mer!

(Also! I have seen your comments and wanted to confirm, this fic updates every
Wednesday. I try to keep to a schedule and don't worry, if it changes, I'll let you know :)
)

Surprise!

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Phil has rebuilt this nest three times and he'd be more angry about it if he wasn't so delighted.

A third miracle, confirmed by Techno, which was good because Wil could get a bit excitable. He would never accuse his son of lying, exactly, but when Wil got into his dramatic monologues, he could get confusing.

But when Techno had slinked back into the cave, pupless and supporting and injured Wilbur, Phil had been surprised. He surveyed them with quick eyes, darting over where they kept the potions. "What happened? Did Schlatt or another pod get involved?" He said, vials clinking as he rifled through them. Usually they were organized better but in his hurry to shuffle the nest to another cave, things had gotten a bit messier than he liked.

"Nah, they didn't even get close." Techno said, lowering Wilbur down into the nest. Philza went to him first with the potion before pausing. Techno was far less injured than he would have expected for the fight, just a few scrapes and scratches on his hands. Wilbur was more injured, but only bruised.

Not quite enough to need potions but it looked like it hurt and it's not like he hadn't been making more than they needed with the news. Pups could go through so many potions when they were young.

He shook his head with a sigh. What had his boys gotten into? Phil passed the potion to Techno, bringing the other to Wilbur. This close, it was obvious the wounds were superficial but Philza still sighed in relief when he didn't see damage to Wilbur's tail, he had been worried when the other refused to swim. "Why were you carrying your brother around then?" He said.

Wilbur huffed loudly, taking the potion and gulping it down. "It's the least he could do after he kicked my ass." Wilbur said. Phil's eyebrow went up.

"How did that happen?" He said. Protectors almost never went after their podmates, only for very specific reasons. That last time Techno had sparred with Wilbur, who loathed fighting, was when the other was trying to eat sand again.

Techno huffed, looking guilty. Wil would have him wrapped around his finger for ages after this. "Wilbur set off my instincts." He said, shaking his head.

"What did I do to deserve that anyways, Mr. Technoblade?" Wilbur shot back. Philza shook his head, collecting the vials. His boys could sort it out between them, he needed to reach out to his birds and get the news.

If they came back without the pups, that meant the pups were still out there. If another pod had taken them, he would need to take them back. Even one of their pod was more than a match for most in the area, but they wanted to collect the pups without scaring them too much. Most pups didn't respond well at first when their first meeting was bloody.

And if they were back on land... Phil was fast losing his patience with whoever had convinced these pups to stay on land. It wasn't healthy at their stage of development and their caretakers must be clearly lacking.

"He was a pup and you attacked him."

It felt like all of the air had been sucked out of the cave. Technoblade said it as a matter of fact.

"I, what is that supposed to mean?" Wilbur said, pushing himself up. The bruises were already beginning to fade. "Of course I knew which two were pups, I wasn't going to harm a hair on Tubbo or Tommy's heads."

"Not him." Techno huffed, examining the blankets very closely. Gold shimmered under blankets, clearly not enough judging by Techno's huff. And Phil couldn't help but roll his eyes, even as he sat frozen in anticipation. He told Techno they weren't adding more gold to the nest, the other loved draping his podmates in it but it didn't make for a comfortable nest. "The one you were attacking."

"Tall kid?" Wilbur said, tilting his head to the side. "The one covered in sand?"

Phil made a chiding whistle and Wilbur cringed a bit. "Wilbur, we told you to stop trying to eat sand." He said, why was his pup like this? "It's not good for your teeth no matter what you say and you'll get a stomach ache."

"It wasn't about the sand, the sand was just an unexpected delightful bonus." Wilbur argued. He pointed at Techno. Phil made another chiding whistle, Wilbur knew better than that. "But enough about me, let's go back to teaming up against Techno."

"How about we don't." Techno said but he found himself on the receiving end of the two curious looks. "Right, well, when I pursued them into the forest, they managed to push me into one of the ponds there. Kept me shifted which was why it took so long to show up."

"L." Wilbur snickered.

"Don't steal my brand, Wilbur." Techno rumbled, tail flicking the other. Phil hissed, a command to settle down. He wanted to hear what came next, even if he was sure of what he knew. He needed it to be confirmed. "The tall kid fell in as well, transformed as soon as he hit the water and started panicking. He's a pup, just like the others. Can't pick an age but has to be less than two decades."

Phil's next breath came in a wondering gasp. Three pups. Three little baby pups. Two decades, that was so young for their kind. Most pups were still playing around in the nest at that age, not more than five feet from a podmate.

Techno kept going. "I thought there was something off about the kid at the library when he used me as a shield. He must have recognized me as a protector, he calmed right down when I cued him right, until Tommy jumped in."

Hatchmates, they had to be. Someone had been somehow lucky enough to get three pups to hatch. But who? And how? Two pups were a miracle, three were nearly impossible.

It was good for pups to have hatchmates. Normally, their podmates would play the role in a case where only one pup was born but pups naturally gravitated towards their hatchmates. They swam together, hunted together, and stayed in the same pod. His pups had been so cute when they were still little and curled up together.

"They got their little magic flares too, aw, it was so cute." Wilbur said, not to be outdone in sharing cute stories of the pups Phil hadn't gotten to see yet. "I'm not sure what Tommy did, maybe some sort of water control? Or elemental? But I saw him do a little trick on the beach."

"Tall kid tried to freeze me." Techno said. "Not well, but he sure tried."

It was a good thing he had decided to move to their larger nesting cave, Phil thought, already working on adjusting the nest. They would need a lot more space for three pups. Normally they would move here till the pups were a century or two, but with two pups and they being forced into being more active than normal, he deemed it a better choice.

The cave was beautiful but he couldn't quite escape the thought that it wasn't quite good enough. He and Kristin had gone all out to decorate it for Wilbur and Techno and most of the enchantments were still fresh and new.

Smugly, he doubted any of the other mer in the area had a nest quite this good. Soft intricate seaweed mats woven in with blankets and pillows of all types and colors, dripping with enchantments. As delightful as the human made work could occasionally be, enchantments were needed to keep it fresh and new. The nest took up most of the room, the rest filled with soft sand and the occasional bit of escaped golden jewelry.

A dim glow lit the cavern, heated by enchantments carved into the walls that directed the heat from the underwater volcanoes to the wall. That would help with any magic spats if the pups did have some temperature influence.

And one of his crowning achievements was set more to the side, an indentation in the cave flooring. A coral reef, perfect to keep more adventurous pups busy with all of its hiding places and colorful coral.

But he couldn't escape the thought that it wasn't good enough.

"Daddy Philza's gone broody again." He heard Wilbur whisper and he flicked him with a click. He heard the longing tone in his voice. Three pups.

"We'll be hearing him mother hen for weeks." Techno complained. He shifted, drawing out a golden necklace and dropping it on Wilbur. Another for Philza.

“I am the only sane one in this family.” Both Techno and Philza stared at him. “What? The worst thing I did was try to eat the humans!”

“About that.” Techno rumbled. His eyes were on the golden jewelry in his hands. Philza nudged him to move, busily rearranging the blankets and pillows until they felt perfect. Which took three minutes. Caretaker instincts could be so tiring. “How sure are we really that they are?”

“Are what?” Philza said, looking at Techno. “Pups? Because I’m pretty sure they are, mate.”

His birds had confirmed one and both of his sons had witnessed the pups transforming. Humans were pitifully behind in the magic department, he doubted they could have pulled that off.

“Think about it, old man. We know there’s four that run in their little group and all because they keep showing up. We knew Tommy but the other two transformed too. What if they’re all mer pups?” Techno said. Philza stilled. “We’re three for four at this point.”

Wilbur let out a musical hum, pillowing his head on his arms. “It would make sense.” He said thoughtfully. “Hatchmates staying with hatchmates. It explains why they freaked out so much when I tried to eat them.”

Philza paused in his adjusting. “That would be impossible.” He said slowly, shaking his head. He wanted it to be. He truly, really did. Four pups would be tiring and wonderful. But no, it wasn’t meant to be. The amount of energy to get four pups? It wasn’t possible. Three pups were already straining belief. “And there’s no way we wouldn’t have known about a nest hatching of that magnitude. Three could maybe have been hidden, but four? We nearly destroyed ourselves to nurture you two to hatch. And my birds see everything around here.”

If mer pups were delicate, hatching was even harder. There was no way four were possible, unless two or three nests merged but he would have known about that ripple of news.

Unless...

It hadn’t done anything for centuries, but it would explain the inconsistencies. The attachment to land, the miraculous little nest of pups. He’d need to go check on this. And call Kristin because she would want to know. But it was unlikely still, how likely was it that that had finally worked again?

“I don’t think so.” Phil said finally. “We’ll need to see about collecting the pups though. I doubt Schlatt’s pod are going to take this lying down and my sources told me that Sempe and Captain are on the move.”

Wilbur whined that he didn’t want to go out and he had Techno arguing with him within seconds. Philza shook his head fondly, turning back to the nest. Just perfect for their pod and three pups.

After a moment, he adjusted some of the soft woven seaweed and sand so the nest was bigger. Just in case.

“I’m going to tear that stupid-” Quackity trailed off into a hiss as he furiously adjusted pillows. Schlatt hadn’t even been aware that there was a way to furiously adjust pillows but there goes Quackity.

“It could have been worse.” Connor broke in. He had given up on lying in the nest, reclining in one of the ledges built into the walls of the cave. He shrugged under Quackity and Schlatt’s unimpressed gazes. “We could have lost the pups to Philza’s pod. It would be a pain to get that back from him. And we know where they are, which is close to our territory.”

“But where they are is not where I want them to be.” Schlatt said, claws clicking on the bottle underneath his hand. He kept replaying the scenario over in his head.

He had them right under his claw, he knew he did. He could see it in the Tubbo kid’s eyes. They were smart, a kid that took after him but not quite seasoned yet. As much as he and his friend kicked up a fuss, they knew there was no way that they would beat Schlatt and his pod in a fight. Techno and Wilbur were distracted with their little brawl. All they needed to do was take one more step and they would have been his.

And then that fucking human had come in with fireworks. The bottle shattered as Schlatt hissed at the memory. The blinding flash and loud crackle had forced them back, just long enough for the pups to flee with the humans again. It wouldn’t work a second time, that he knew. The surprise element was gone now.

“Stop ruining my work.” Quackity said, swooping in to start clearing out the broken glass. “I worked hard on rebuilding the nest.”

Schlatt cast a lazy eye over it with a smirk. “Could be better.” he said with a shrug. Quackity spat something in Spanish before going for his throat.

Conner rolled his eyes, tail beating idly against the ledge. “Me and Charlie could scout out the area.” He said out loud to the brawling pair. “Start clearing a route to take them before the other pods make a bid for it. I don’t think an accident is going to happen again.”

“OO, I love going on land! I feel so dry!” Charlie said, perking up. He had flopped onto a massive pillow, stubbornly resisting Quackity’s attempt to move him earlier. “I like this idea! We should do this.”

“And maybe see how we can start?” Conner said. “I mean, are we pulling a decoy or just straight nabbing? We can make either work but it’ll be hard to pull four pups, especially as we don’t have everyone here yet because Tina is out on patrol and Karl hasn’t shown which side he’ll settle.”

Schlatt snorted. “Two pups.” He corrected. “The other two are humans who decided to stick around for some fucking reason. Three humans now.”

“I still think there’s something weird about that tall kid.” Quackity said, flipping himself over to settle into the nest. “Tubbo said it was nothing but pequeño tesoro could be lying. Techno

attacked Wilbur when the other tried to eat him and normally those two are joined at the hip. It has to be something big to get Techno to attack Wilbur.”

“Hmm.” Schlatt said thoughtfully. He had noticed that as well. And as annoying as Wilbur could be, Techno attacking him out of nowhere wasn’t likely. “We can just grab him as well, even if he’s not useful, he’ll be a good meal. They’ll be back on that main island by now”

“I hate going on land.” Conner mumbled, flipping off of his little ledge. “It’s so dry and hot.”

Schlatt stared at Conner. “It might help if you picked something other than pajamas to wear.” He said slowly. “I told you we have a brand. Wear a fucking suit like the rest of us.”

“But the pajamas are comfortable! And the colors match mine.” Conner said, the words whistling slightly. Schlatt debated once again why he had decided to be podmates with this guy. “Also, I think I run faster in them.”

“I’ll go with you.” Quackity said before Schlatt could decide whether it was worth the delay to brawl with Conner again. He arranged the last of the nesting materials. “I think I’ve got this as good as it’ll get right now, considering you guys will mess it up as soon as I turn my back on it. I need to check on the shop anyway. Charlie can stay.”

“Oh no, not that, Charlie.”

“This is going to be great!” Charlie cheered. “Schlatt, would you like to hear everything about that jellyfish I saw down near one of the underwater canyons? It was really cool.”

“No, I don’t want to hear about the jellyfish again.” Schlatt said, fins flaring in agitation. This was the third time Charlie started talking about the jellyfish. It wasn’t even that interesting of a jellyfish. If the other wasn’t so good with pups, he’d consider sending them out on one of the long patrols when they brought the pups back.

Charlie was just good at connecting with pups. Not quite a caretaker but someone that pups always felt comfortable with.

Everything was set up and ready to go for them to collect the pups. As much as Quackity bitched about it, they all knew that the nest was near perfectly arranged. He bet it was even better than whatever Phil’s pod had and he should see about rubbing that in next time he saw them.

They had picked their nest just because it had the most perfect spot. Part of the cave was above water, kept filled with fresh air by tiny solidified lava tubes. Far too small for a pup to climb through but big enough that with a few enchantments, they even had a garden up there.

A spur of the moment decision two centuries ago had really paid off. It had been a bitch moving the plants in and finishing up the enchantments, but it would be perfect to give the pups room to play.

And it would provide additional encouragement for the pups to want to stay, beyond their instincts. He had no doubt that pups who had likely been raised on land would enjoy a little

reminder in the safety of the nest.

He'd like to see them beat that.

This wasn't about winning (because if it was, Schlatt would have already won). But it was about making a point.

Across the room in what served as his desk, he had enchanted papers. One, he had nearly destroyed before deciding it would be sweeter to keep it and read it again on his victory day.

A letter, from Philza himself. Dripping with false concern, if Schlatt and his pod were ready to raise a pup, much less two. So young! Were they sure that they could properly raise a pup? And anyways, Schlatt would surely enjoy living a less restricted life.

Nah.

As if he wasn't as well established as Philza by now. As if his magic wasn't powerful, or his pod not powerful. It was a direct insult, what they had done, and he wasn't going to stand for it.

And beyond that? This was personal. He wanted those pups.

He had thought it would be centuries until he had one himself. Pups were rare and even Schlatt's extensive information network found it hard to turn up scraps of reliable information. Pods kept that under lock and key, turf wars being known to break out over pups.

But then he found two and they were ones Schlatt truly wanted. Little Tubbo had a mind as quick as a whip and talent on top of it. And he looked like Schlatt, in a way that felt like it was meant for him to be his pup. The wild attitude of his friend was adorable and would fit in perfectly. Tommy would be just right to spark some chaos in the nest.

He wasn't giving up on this.

"We can make a bid tomorrow night, I doubt anyone will try anything tonight." Quackity was saying. "Wilbur got smacked pretty good and Techno will still be riding that adrenaline."

"What about the other pods though? I doubt no one saw that mess." Connor pointed out, hesitating by the tunnel exit. "The island section maybe, but the chase was obvious. The boat got away too. They'll be keeping an eye on them just for that."

This was why they had wanted this first plan to work. When he saw the pup, Schlatt knew he needed to strike while the iron was hot. Because now, the news was spreading and he couldn't control it anymore.

Even if he fed the rumor mill, there was no way the other pods wouldn't notice two pods shifting their nests and preparing.

"Only Philza's pod has a nest prepped by now, I doubt the others could get it ready in a night." Quackity dismissed. He had been bitching for hours about how fast he had to get the

nest set up properly to accommodate the pups and they didn't even have them yet. "The others won't risk moving until they know what's going on. And it'll work out better to take a bit longer. I've gotta get the shop ready to run on its own for a bit and we've all got some loose ends to pin."

Schlatt grimaced. He had his fingers in some of the island politics. It made it far easier for mer to be dismissed as nothing but fantasy. But it did mean it was hard for him to disappear into the waves for too long.

Maybe he could fake his death and let Philza or someone from the other pods deal with politics for a bit.

...

Nah, he liked fucking with the humans too much.

"It'll be symbolic too." Charlie said. Schlatt rolled his eyes.

"How so?" He drawled. What kind of weird theory had Charlie come up with now? And was it going to be better than the stupid jellyfish?

"Well, it's a full moon tomorrow, isn't it?" Charlie pointed out, tail flicking against his cushion. "Good time for new friends. Lots of magic in the air."

Schlatt hummed. "You know, for once you might be onto something there." He said. Full moons were special in their culture for a reason. And having full moons so close together, it was a good sign. His magic would be supercharged as well that night. That would make the mission far easier.

"It's settled then." Quackity said, rolling his eyes at Schlatt's judging look. Gotta keep him on his toes sometimes even if Quackity never seemed to care. "Conner will scout out the pup and see where their pod is. I'll tie up my shop and join him. Schlatt, Connor, you guard the nest and see if you can put a pin in your stuff as well."

"I'll make sure that none of the other pods are moving!" Charlie chirped. "It'll be fun! I'll get to talk with the slimes again!"

"...the what."

"Jellyfish are so much fun!"

Schlatt huffed. "It would have been easier if you hadn't made me move my laptop." He pointed out. Quackity hissed at him. Usually he kept his laptop on his desk but nooo, that was far too much of a risk to keep in the nest room with pups. Schlatt really doubted they could do that much damage but Charles had offered to destroy it to make them stop arguing and he didn't like that glint in Quackity's eyes.

Moving the enchantments that let it keep working was a pain in the ass but not as much of a pain as having to replace the damn thing. Buying it, enchanting it, and then getting it into the nest had been far too much trouble.

He felt like he needed a drink just thinking about it. But the laptop was useful when he needed to contact his political or business contacts but didn't feel like going on land.

But fine, the thing was moved.

"Ah, ah." He reminded Quackity. "You have to get going. We have a plan to pull it off by the full moon."

Within a few days, those pups would be his.

"I'm moving tomorrow. I'm not waiting any longer."

"Relax, it'll go well! You've been keeping an eye on things and no one's expecting us to move this early."

...

"Pity about the island."

"I got a chance to take a look at it. I'm no mage, but there's footprints there."

"See, he knows what he's doing. We'll move tomorrow. But remember. You're in my pod now. It won't be just your pup."

"Worth it."

Quiet laughter filled the air. "They really thought they could hide this, didn't they?"

"I suppose we'll prove them wrong then."

"I'll scout out first then we'll move in--"

"Yes, that goes without saying that you'll scout with who was there. We all know who you want to see, even if I admit I'm not sure why."

"...maybe I'll get lucky this time."

"...maybe."

Miles away, five kids sneezed simultaneously.

A bit of an interlude chapter! I enjoyed writing this and finally getting to shovel in some of my lore on mer magic and dynamics.

And look! They're finally realizing it! Maybe.

The Big Chill

Chapter Notes

Finally I can drop some lore!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Talking to people? Terrible. But research? Tubbo lived for that

He missed the days when the only threat was stupid Clay. Those days were far easier, even if he never thought he'd say it. He knew exactly how to deal with bullies though the island situation had complicated a bit more than he would like.

As long as he didn't lose Tommy, he'd push back until Clay got bored or scared off. Firecrackers, taunts, deals, Tubbo had dealt with far too many bullies.

Okay, Clay was still annoying and concerned him because the asshole could seriously harm them. He wasn't that downgraded.

But there was a big difference between the average bully and... whatever the fuck those Mer had been. For one, Clay hadn't yet tried to kill and/or threaten to eat any of his friends. For another, he wasn't a fish person who lived in the ocean.

And the last point, Tubbo wasn't a fish person when he first dealt with Clay.

He had to admit, if someone told him about this happening when he first came to the island, he would have called them insane. That one day, he would be crammed onto a bean bag, holding a slowly warming can of watermelon juice, pressed so close to Tommy that he could feel his heartbeat.

"Your elbow is on my back." Tommy complained, but he made no move to get up. Tubbo would have followed him if he did. He wanted the reminder that Tommy was safely with him, that they had made it back across the ocean to the island again.

He had been on edge the entire ride, just waiting for one of the mer to pop up out of the water. They were pretty much sitting ducks in Dogchamp. If the mer so much as upended the boat, the four of them would be mer again, surrounded by the others. And he knew Purpled and Ranboo hadn't practiced swimming.

They had split up when they reached the mainland. It was too risky that one of them had been noticed missing or that one of the mer were following. Fundy had given them his address and a time to meet before waving goodbye, leaving the four to awkwardly separate. Tubbo had been on edge the entire morning and afternoon, waiting for the time they had agreed on.

The entire morning felt charged somehow. Primed. It was lucky Clementine was called to work and couldn't see how weird they were acting.

It had been a close thing that none of them had pulled Purpled into the water. He wondered if the other had thought about that, glancing to where the other was sitting against the wall by Fundy's door. Ranboo was sitting on Fundy's bed, fiddling with his suit jacket.

Fundy, for his part, was sitting at his computer desk. The room wasn't small, instead, most of it had been consumed by a sprawling computer set up. "You probably have great minecraft loading." Tubbo mumbled, taking a sip. "Max your render distance."

He didn't usually drink watermelon juice but it was all Fundy's fridge had. And luckily, it didn't make him want to throw up.

"Oh, yeah, it does. I have a few servers up and I do some coding. I can show you some time." Fundy said, looking up from his screen. He clicked on a file, finally pulling up the pdf. "It's pretty fast but I just hid this information really deep. I didn't want to risk anyone getting into my computer and finding this."

"Gonna admit, I expect it to be cooler, like an old notebook or something." Tommy said. He flicked Tubbo at the other's look. "Hey, I watched those fucking shows with you! It's always like, old books and maps and stuff."

"Well, yeah, but that's kind of risky. Pretty easy to steal or book and neither of us wanted to rewrite it if it got damaged. So when I was about twelve, Mom typed it up and we've been adding to that draft ever since." Fundy said, scrolling down a bit. "I mean, I could see if we still have the old journal Mom put together when she first started collecting everything but it's a bit outdated now."

"No, it's fine." Tubbo said, pushing himself up. "Do you have anything about how to turn us back?"

He felt Tommy flinch but held steady. In another world, Tubbo would have hated giving this up. Yeah, it was stupid and risky to keep. They'd have to go the rest of their lives careful around water, making sure to stay far away from bullies like Clay who would have no hesitancy about pushing them in. Not to mention the weird cravings or sudden rejections of their favorite foods.

But at the same time? He loved it. He really did. The feeling of freedom when he hit the water, like no one could tell him where to go or what to do. The warm feeling that they had magic because that's what Tommy's abilities had to be. And most of all, how it bound them together.

Because deep down he was a selfish person who took a little bit of thrill in how none of his friends could easily leave him.

But it wasn't worth their lives. Judging by the look he saw in Schlatt and Wilbur's eyes, those two planned to chase them until they won. They tried to kill them on multiple occasions and

Purpled risked losing his job if the mer found out and attacked him when he returned to fish. Better to get rid of it.

His hopes plummeted when Fundy winced. “Not... really? I’m not even sure what exactly happened.” His fingers clicked against the keyboard.

“We told you what we knew. We think it’s because we went into that haunted Moon Pool.” Ranboo said, looking up. “It’s our best guess, we all felt weird when the full moon passed over.”

Tubbo snorted. Honestly, weird was putting it lightly. Looking back felt like remembering a strangely enjoyable drug trip. The weirdest part was at no point did he feel scared. He should have but didn’t, completely relaxed with the knowledge that it was safe somehow,

“Yeah but like, that shouldn’t have happened.” Fundy said, tugging at one of his curls. “Like, it should have failed completely- look, how much do you know about the legend of the Moon Pool? The history and all that.”

“I know a bunch of people got serial killed in it and now the whole island is haunted.” Tommy said. “Rip to them, we’re just built different I guess.”

“I mean, you’re not far off but you’re not quite right either.” Fundy said, spinning his chair around. Tubbo leaned forward, anticipating a story here. “But it’s pretty pertinent to you so I’ll roll through it.

The exact story of the Moon Pool had been lost to them. But the general sense me and Mom found has remained the same. Once upon a time, long before that colony tried to settle there, Mako Island was bustling with life. Thriving villages, robust trade, most relying on the ocean to provide what they needed. And one, a fisherman, found himself heading out everyday, further than anyone else had. For the pickings were rich out by the deep sea valleys.”

Until one day, his nets turned up empty. And then again. And again. And finally, he demanded an answer of the ocean as to who was stealing his fish. And to his surprise, a Mer appeared.

This is the hazy part. We know they talked, yeah. And some how, he won her over instead of her simply eating him for impudence. But we don’t exactly know how. But it all came down to the point that they fell in love. Every day, he went out to meet her, bringing gifts from the land and every day she sent him back with full nets, his pockets loaded with riches of the deep. Honestly, seems pretty happy to me

But people started to talk. Envy, fear, superstition, greed, all of them have been thrown around as reasons. But the end result is the same. The people of the island decided that the fisherman would bring bad luck upon them from the ocean. So, they brought him to a cave and destroyed the entrance.

The mer, realizing her love was gone, tore the island apart in her rage. But her abilities were limited, at that time, mer couldn’t leave the water. She sank every ship, tore apart the piers, and drowned those looking to collect water. But she couldn’t make it to the cave. So, on the

night of the full moon, the mer asked for help. She reached deep into the ocean and called for it to answer, offering the lives of those who had wronged her and been slain as recompense.

The ocean answered, opening a tunnel from the sea to the cave. But she was too late. Her love had passed away. And in her grief, she asked for a new bargain. Here, we don't know what was promised. But incredibly, the ocean answered again. Lying in the pool created from her tears, under the full moon, the man transformed into a mer. The first of the human turned mer, alive and well again. She took him to the sea with her and lived out their days, happy and in love."

"That sounds like bullshit." Purpled skeptically said, resting his chin on his hands. "So, what, there was another village before Mako Island? And nobody knew about it? And what kind of bullshit happy ending is that?"

"A common theme in stories relating to the mer is the use of blood and sacrifice." Fundy said, waving a hand. "Like in the little mermaid version where her sisters gave her a knife to kill a prince? In a real mer tale, she would have done it."

"Wait, what?" Tommy said horrified. Tubbo patted his shoulder. Tommy loved the Disney versions far too much.

"The general message is that for whatever reason, magic created the Moon Pool. And because of that, every full moon, where the light shines down on the pool, it can change humans into mer."

Tubbo... felt kind of sick. It was one thing to guess that their field trip to the Moon Pool on a stupid dare had been the cause of this. But it was another entirely to hear for certain that all of their trouble had come from that stupid dare and jumping in the pool. Fuck, he even convinced Ranboo to get in. If they had been a couple minutes later or earlier or just told Clay to fuck off-

Tommy squeezed his hand, bringing him out of his spiraling thoughts. Tubbo shot him a weak smile. He felt like his words were trapped in his throat.

"But anyways, back to the story." Fundy said, clearing his throat. "It gets kind of spotty until the new village appears on Mako Island long after most of that bloody tale was forgotten, but by then, the pods saw an opportunity. For a trueborn mer is exceedingly rare."

"Really?" Tubbo said. He had gotten the idea that the mer were weirdly focused on them being pups but he had been more focused on the age thing. But apparently, pups, in general, were rare? "How does that make sense?"

"I mean, it makes sense then, why they would want us so much?" Ranboo said. "If we're that rare? Because if they live for so long, there has to be some reason they're not everywhere in the ocean at some point."

Tubbo had to concede that. Tommy had seen a likely mer rip a mako shark in half. He didn't think they had a lot of predators in the food chain. "But then why not just change a whole bunch of people with the pool?"

“I’m getting to that.” Fundy said before continuing. “Because they did. The strange mystery killings of Mako Island weren’t the work of pirates or strange hysteria. On the night of the full moon, mer of all pods snatched humans from their chores or sang them out of their beds. When they had as many as they could herd to the cave, they brought them to the pool under the light of the full moon and pushed them in.”

“But they died.” Purpled said dully. “That’s how the stories go. People would find bodies in the Moon Pool and no guard or watcher or spy ever came back. But why wouldn’t it have worked? We did all the same things they did and there weren’t any dead bodies left behind.”

And that was the question, wasn’t it? Why had they come back alive? Did the mer kill the people for some reason?

Fundy snorted. “I don’t even think the mer people know the answer. Mom did a lot of research trying to nail down who was killed or at least when. There’s not a common pattern, but there is a common thread. Differing group sizes, ages, jobs, they were experimenting. Every full moon, they were trying something new. For some reason, very few people survive the transition. The rest die when the light shines on the pool.”

That wasn’t worth thinking about. The fact that one of them could have died in the pool. “It means you have no idea why we survived, do you?” Tubbo asked, squeezing Tommy’s hand harder. “There’s not much information but it doesn’t sound like we’re anything like the fisherman.”

“Yeah, no. You might not be the only ones or you might be. We haven’t a single clue.” Fundy said with a shrug. And Tubbo wanted to shake him until the answers came out. “No names were taken down and most of the records were destroyed when people fled. But I can tell you other things!”

“Like what?”

“Well, for one, I know of a few defenses we can rig up which we’ll need to do soon. We’re not sure when the ability was acquired but most mer in the area can appear human and leave the ocean.” Fundy said. Tubbo caught on right away.

“You’ll think they’ll make an attempt on us at our homes.” He said. He had seen Techno chase them through the forest but he still hadn’t really considered that the mer could truly follow them out of the ocean. This was supposed to be their safe space!

“Tonight, most likely. It’s full moon, that’s potent magic time and it makes their trip onto land far easier.” Fundy said, swinging back around to look at the computer. “Mom is working the late shift tonight and couldn’t call in sick so we’ll need to figure out a plan. She wanted to be here but got called in for an emergency shift.”

“Can we just call the fucking cops? Kidnapping is illegal, innit?” Tommy said, draining the last of his juice. “Seems like the easy solution to me.”

“Nope. Schlatt, the one we dealt with? He practically runs the island government.” Fundy said with a snort. Tubbo froze. “Even if they didn’t, I doubt the cops could deal with someone

like Techno or even Wilbur. You can sleep over at my house, that'll slow them down a bit."

But Tubbo was thinking of something different. "Clementine, our foster parent, said their work called them out unexpectedly. They left a note. Boo, what about yours?"

Ranboo frowned. "My mother and father are getting wine and dine by a client again." He admitted. "I mean, that's not weird because they're usually out at night but--"

Tubbo leaned forward, flopping on top of Tommy and trying to still his racing heart. "I dunno about Purpled but that means coincidentally all the adults in our houses are out? On the night of the full moon. That can't be right."

Purpled looked away when they glanced at him. "I told Punz not to come fishing because I'm with friends today so he's out and my parents... are out too."

It took everything Tubbo had not to beam. Purpled calls them friends! Though judging from the faint red tint on the other's face, the other did not want them to point that out. Or even notice it.

Fundy let out a truly inventive stream of swears, slamming his hands on the desk. "Well, that means they're definitely coming tonight." He said. "Fuck. I've got some fireworks and traps we can rig up around the house."

"Why can't we just go somewhere else?" Ranboo asked, shrinking on himself as one hand drifted to his ankle. It had bruised heavily overnight but Ranboo had assured him he was fine. Even as he had limped through the house.

If Tubbo ever saw Techno again, he would hit him.

Purpled snorted. "To where? There's no chance we can get to the mainland and they'll be watching for us leaving again. School and Library get locked up at night. If we go to a more crowded area, maybe, but Fundy just told us about the mer slaughtering groups of people. I doubt going to the boardwalk would slow them down much."

Tubbo winced. "Yeah, I'm gonna side with Purpled on this. At the beach-" He hesitated and Tommy squeezed his hand. "Wilbur could have killed me easily. If he could do that to more than one person, he could wipe out everyone."

"No people." Fundy said. "But if we can last until midnight, my mom will get home and she'll know more about helping."

"Why not just call her right fucking now then?" Tommy pointed out. "Why do we have to wait and deal with those fuckers?"

"She's a marine biologist at an aquarium, she can't have her phone with her at work. Confidentiality and well, she could just drop it in the tanks." Fundy said with a sigh. "But she did leave me a few weapons and the house is pretty secure. We'll have some extra time because they'll probably try your houses first. Mom moved after she dated Wilbur so we're

pretty much as far from the water as we can get and he wouldn't know the address but I wouldn't put it past them to figure it out."

That was definitely not what Tubbo wanted to hear. "I guess we better start cracking then." He said, looking out the window. It was getting close to the end of sunset, shadows drawing long already. "What can we do?"

"Kick their ass!" Tommy crowed. "Just let me at them and I'll make them regret ever coming after- ow!"

Tubbo leaned back after swatting Tommy's shoulder. "Techno nearly broke Ranboo's ankle without breaking a sweat and one of them tore apart a shark. I love you Tommy, but I've seen you on the floor after you stubbed your toe."

"You said we'd never discuss that again!"

"I lied. I have so much blackmail."

"Right." Fundy said, trying to break through their scuffle. "So, I've got some popping fireworks but they're best as a surprise especially if the mer are in their human forms. Rope traps, sometimes simple is the best. Most of the mer are less coordinated out of the water so if you can trip or tangle them, that buys more time. Mom chipped out divots at all the doors."

"I saw that. I tripped over one. Is that to make water traps?" Ranboo asked. He waved a hand. "Because they'll turn back too? Why don't you have that all the time."

"Well, for one, you guys can get caught in it too." Fundy pointed out, drumming his fingers. Tubbo winced at the thought of being trapped in one of those divots. They were wide and long but very shallow. The very thought of it made his fish brain feel panicked, heart thrumming at the thought of predators or laying in such shallow water. Fish brain wasn't very helpful. "Secondly, the water can be a hit or miss. Adults have far better control over their form than pups do and usually it takes a lot of water to change them. Much more than a splash."

"We got lucky with Techno then." Tubbo said, his wide eyes meeting Ranboo's shades. That wasn't a good thought. Ranboo had nearly gotten caught trapping Techno but if the other hadn't changed... it would have been far harder to escape.

Fundy pointed at him. "Exactly. The divots are useful but they're usually more of an implied threat. Except, we're in luck, because tonight's the full moon. Whatever magic lets them change forms weakens slightly on the full moon as their own magic grows and so the water in the puddle could turn them. It still takes a good amount, but they're a lot bigger of a deterrent."

"Right then, I want the fireworks." Tommy said. He ducked before Tubbo could swat him. "And Tubs can have fireworks too. As a treat."

"Damn right." Tubbo informed him. Tommy knew how much he enjoyed blowing things up. He would relish getting sanctioned to throw fireworks at other people. And for a good cause

too! It was practically charity! He should be sainted.

“Ranboo and I will work on the traps then.” Fundy said. Ranboo winced and Fundy folded his arms. “It, uh, doesn’t have to be together. I’ll show you what to do but I know you don’t like dealing with water. And there’s a few ritual components I can’t do that might be useful for defense.”

“Right, that’ll leave me on hose duty, I guess.” Purpled said, standing up. Tubbo looked around the room, smiling. He had Tommy at his side, his friends in front of him... What could go wrong?

A lot of things but he was trying not to ruin the vibe right now.

Purpled was pretty sure he should ask for hazard pay at this point.

He sat next to the back door divot, looking out over the back porch. Over the hissing of the hose, he could hear the crackle pop of fireworks and Tubbo and Tommy’s maniacal laughter. He had chosen to go to the back porch first, the others busying themselves on the front porch. Twilight was starting to give way to night and an eerie silence came with it.

Part of him wanted to luxuriate in finally having more time to himself but the itch in the back of his mind just wouldn’t let him rest.

It wasn’t fair. He should’ve charged far more money for that trap, fuck, he could have charged far more money for it now. A bit of easy cash and he had ended up with something that threatened his entire fishing career.

But he couldn’t and it pissed him off. Now, everytime he rightfully charged him, it came with guilt. Guilt! Messing with his money!

There was a soft gurgling sound as the divot overflowed and Purpled cursed, scrambling back towards the spigot. He twisted it with a bit more force than necessary, eying the puddle of water with annoyance. He couldn’t even grab the hose, he had to grab the tubing and slowly ease it out so it wouldn’t splash. “Fuck this.” He mumbled.

“Damn. What did that hose do to you?”

Purpled nearly jumped out of his skin, scowling when he looked up. “Fuck you too, Punz.” He said. The other was leaning against the side fence, next to the open gate. “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Fuck, he must be really out of it if he didn’t hear one of the others direct Punz to the backyard.

“I knew you wouldn’t miss the weekend fishing run unless it was life or death so I figured I’d come by and check on you.” Punz said. Purpled rolled his eyes. That was true enough, the weekend was when he made the most money. It had hurt to have to give up that potential but fuck it, couldn’t make money under the ocean. “What are you doing?”

“Hanging with friends. Like I said.” Something about this nagged at Purpled but he wasn’t quite sure what. “Satisfied?”

“Brat.” Punz said but there was a strangely fond edge that made his heart warm slightly. Punz was a jerk but he was a likable one. “I cut into my working hours to come check on you.”

“Get bored of work?” Purpled snarked. “Or did you get kicked off all the other boats in the marina?”

“You wish. I would like to say I have some very lucrative contracts in place.” Punz shot back. “I just figured I’d give you the option to do some night fishing while the spots are clear. Kindness of my own heart.”

“And your wallet.”

It was a tempting offer as Purpled looked back at the divot. There was a good reason he risked night fishing when sharks were hunting and some of the less legal boating operations came out. The pay was good. Really good. Restaurants paid top dollar to have fish as soon as they could and one night of fishing meant he could monopolize some of the top buyers in town. It would mean not having to wake up hours before school tomorrow and maybe sleep in for once.

Maybe it would be fine... Purpled had lived on the water almost his entire life. The mer probably wouldn’t expect him to be out there. And he’d have Punz backing him up who was an ass who took way too much money from their contracts but he had seen the other lift four heavy crates of fish at once.

“I guess-”

There was a sharp pop as Tubbo set off another firework, closer to the backyard this time and Punz-

Jumped. And there was no reason that should make Purpled feel weird but it strangely did. “I’ll just text the others real quick.” He said, fishing his phone out with one hand. No need to risk Tommy dragging the others on a rescue mission and scaring away the fish.

“That’s really not-”

Punz’s words drifted into static as Purpled stared down at his screen. It had opened onto the last message he had sent.

Purpled: I’m staying with friends. Find a different boat today.

With a dawning grim horror, the nagging turned into a wail. “Punz.” He said slowly, a hiss creeping into his words. But Purpled didn’t linger on that, glaring at the other. “How did you know which friend I went to? And the address?”

“Another fisherman mentioned-” Purpled didn’t let him finish, lunging for the spigot, holding the hose like a weapon. Someone bowled him over before he could reach it, Punz rolling them away and trying to pull the hose out of his hands. Punz’s blue eyes were dark, angry.

How could he have been so fucking *stupid*.

None of the other fishermen or women would have known who his friends were or where they lived. Purpled kept his life locked down tight. He didn't take anyone else fishing and he kept any talk business. And that should have given him reason to suspect something was up when Punz sauntered up to his boat and made him that bet. He even considered going night fishing with killing mer hunting them.

But there had been something strangely... calming about the other. Trustworthy. And Punz had slid into his boat so well, joking with him and challenging him over money and he seemed like he understood. Really understood.

But looking back, Purpled couldn't think of why he took that bet. Or let it keep happening despite turning down every partnership before.

Purpled opened his mouth to scream (and oh, how his instincts wailed for his nestmates to come save him). But Punz was faster, clamping a hand over his mouth. "You're alright." Punz said, tone firm. You know, like a liar. "It's just me. You know me. I never hurt you. I just want you to be safe."

He bit down, gagging at the taste of blood that flooded his mouth. "Brat." Punz said, and Purpled hated how warm the word still was. If Puns was going to betray him, he might as well do it properly. "If you can't settle, I don't- let this be easy. We can walk through that gate, wave bye to your friends, and do some night fishing."

He didn't want night fishing. He wanted to throw Punz into the ocean with cement shoes.

Purpled tried to elbow him in the solar plexus and Punz sighed. "Fine." He said. "I'll make it up to you later. We'll go night fishing another day."

Punz pulled him up and Purpled tried to scream, muffled as it was. He could hear Tubbo and the others, so so close. But their excited chatter of voices wasn't changing and fuck, another clue there. There was no way any of his (friends) (hatchmates) clients would have let Punz into the back yard alone.

He dug in his heels, trying to make it as difficult as possible as he fought and struggled but if Punz noticed, he didn't show any sign of it. The other was unfairly strong as he pulled him slowly forward, off the porch. "Last chance." Punz warned, pulling him off the porch steps. "Calm down, and we can leave together."

"I'm not letting you hurt us." Purpled said, garbled through the hand over his mouth. But he meant it, strangely enough to himself. He cared about the others getting hurt, outside of client protection. He wanted them to be safe. "*Mer*."

It seemed so obvious in retrospect. How strong Punz was, the speed he could pull up nets. They way everyone seemed to know him and yet not recognize him at the same time, sliding in and out of people's minds. His total ease on the boat, and those stupid fishing spots. And he'd walked right into the trap.

“I never wanted to hurt you. You’re like a little brother to me.” Purpled stared at him, caught between horror, rage, and something he couldn’t identify. Little brother? “I wanted this to be good, we’d go out to the boat and I’d talk you into going into the water with me even if it took a little profit bribing. But you’ve forced my hand. I had to trade some of my gems to make sure I got to keep you, at least.”

“You’re not getting me into the ocean.” Purpled spat, not even touching the boat scenario. Because he wouldn’t have. He was far too smart for that, paranoia honed after years on his own, running his business. He wouldn’t have.

Wouldn’t he?

“I don’t need your agreement.” Punz said darkly. And he let go of Purpled’s hands, reaching up to force Purpled’s chin up.

Purpled started to twist, hands coming up to claw at Punz even as his chin was forced up. But then he saw the full moon, beautiful and bright.

And all of his fear melted away.

Chapter End Notes

To those who thought Punz was trying to push him in a few chapters back, yeah, he definitely was. And congrats to everyone who guessed he was a mer.

Punz no, that’s not how you adopt a brother!

Hey, would you mind letting minnow what you think about this one?

Lovesick

Chapter Notes

I've been planning this for so long

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was pure luck that he dropped the fireworks.

Well, fuck that. It was pure luck that he had dropped the firework package and they had bounced, rolling along the sad little concrete path that led back to Fundy's backyard. He heard Tubbo whistle in amusement and Tommy rolled his eyes. "It was the wind!" He defended. "It must have blown it off course."

"Sure, big man." Tubbo said. He stretched out, still smiling. "But that still means two points to me."

Tommy rolled his eyes, waving a hand as he walked after the rolling fireworks package. For someone who said they had 'some' firework poppers, Fundy sure had a whole lot of him. Not the big fancy kind.

But a few little roman candles, the kind that threw little sparks. Some sparklers. And best of all, the little ones that popped when you threw them at the ground. Each little bundle was carefully wrapped up in crinkly packaging like the world's best present. None of the neighbors even bothered to poke their head outside, if they were even here. Fundy's house was sandwiched in between identical townhomes, most of which had the telltale signs of their owners being gone. Fundy said most of the houses around were vacation homes, convenient now because there was no one to notice as they set up their defenses.

Vacation homes. Bunch of rich weirdos. Who bought a house and didn't even live in it most of the time? Fucking weird. When he ruled the world, he was going to ban that. You got one house, and you lived with it!

But it did mean that there was no one yelling at him and Tubbo when they decided to compete to see who could get the most points. Trick shots welcome. He wasn't quite sure of the rules, but he knew Tubbo was ahead by two points. It was mostly about who could argue that they were confidently in the right.

Maybe it was wasting it but fuck it, Tommy was going to have at least a little fun before he had to deal with those fuckers. They still had plenty left, Tubbo had carefully counted out just a few bundles for them to play around with, leaving the rest for the others to pick up. It had been strangely terrifying playing their game but Tommy had gritted his teeth and pushed through it. Big men didn't get scared of fireworks!

That's how he knew those stupid mer weren't big men because they got scared of fireworks. Fundy could say weird stuff like "light sensitivity" and enhanced hearing all he wanted, he knew that it was because they weren't big men like him.

Tommy sauntered past Fundy and Ranboo, crouched on the ground while they scribbled on it with chalk. A tripwire was laid next to them. Tommy thought it was some kind of magic at first before looking closer and realizing they were estimating where to put the trap. There were a bunch of measurements and sketches of what the trap was going to look at it.

Tommy turned the corner, frowning when he saw the gate was open. Had they left it open when they had come back here? No, that wasn't right, they hadn't come through the back gate at all. Purpled had gone through the back door and they had left through the front.

He was hoping it was just a trick of the shadows but as he drew closer, the moonlight was bright enough to see by and he could see that it wasn't. The gate was wide open, an easy path to the backyard. Tommy didn't even miss a beat, scooping up the fireworks and heading for the gate.

"Purpled, if this is a joke, it's a fucked up one." He warned. Fundy had said that they maybe had a little under an hour left before one of the mer found his house. That his mom had scrubbed records as good as she could but when the mer wanted to find something, they did. But something about this didn't feel right at all.

Maybe Purpled had heard the fireworks and came over to check them out, a little voice in the back of his mind whispered. Opened the fence and took a look. But try as he might, Tommy couldn't make any fucking sense of that. Why wouldn't Purpled use the door? Why would he yell at them?

Purpled had never not snapped at them before if they disturbed him. And slowly, as he drew closer to the gate, he realized the fish part of his brain was quiet. The little annoying bitchy voice in his head was gone.

So when he saw the gate shift as he stepped up to it, he didn't hesitate before throwing himself through with a war cry of swear words that could turn air blue. He ran straight into what felt like a brick wall, immediately twisting to bite them. "Woah, woah, what the fuck? Are you rabid or something?" Tommy screeched in dismay as he was grabbed by the collar, held at arm's length like a loaded weapon.

"Yeah I am and now you're fucking infected, you bitch." He said, baring his teeth. "Prepare to die, motherfucker because it won't be pretty."

For a home intruder, they looked surprisingly... not like one? Not a big man because Tommy was the biggest man ever who had never met anyone bigger than him, but not short as Tubbo, god rest his kneecaps if Tubbo found out he was using him as a measuring stick again. White hoodie, scruffy beard and blond hair, and piercing blue eyes.

Tommy was pretty sure this is what hate at first sight meant. He swung in their grip, trying to take a swing at him before remembering he had fireworks. Bombs. He was gonna fry that fucker and ignore that he just had poppers, he could make this work.

Stranger's eyes widened as Tommy went for the firecrackers. "Wait, just a minute." He warned. Tommy thought about giving an intimidating monologue but honestly he just wanted this guy gone. He had broken into the backyard! "Why the hell do you have explosives on you?"

"Punz?" Tommy froze, twisting around to stare at Tubbo. Sweet, incredibly paranoid Tubbo who had followed him around the side of the house, frowning at what he saw before him. "Why are you here?"

"You know this fucker?" Tommy said with surprise. When had Tubbo met him? Tommy hadn't recognized him from anywhere but he was Tubbo, greeting him like they had met before. But Tommy always knew everyone Tubbo knew because Tubbo was a chill friend like that. "What the fuck?"

"Uh, yeah, he's Purpled's brother I think. He was helping at the market when I went over to say hi to Purpled at the stall. But Purpled didn't say that you were coming over tonight?" Tubbo said, frowning. Tommy frowned back, looking at Punz.

He guessed he and Purpled looked kind of similar? Same annoyed look in their eyes. The hair, maybe, and the deep love for hoodies. But Purpled had never mentioned having a brother. Then again, Purpled rarely talked about himself at all. Tommy had been convinced he had just straight up spawned, no family needed.

Wait. He remembered this fucker! He had never gotten their name, but he remembered them from when he had dragged Wilbitch, Technobitch, and Ranboo over to Dogchamp. He had stood behind Purpled, practically draped over him and glared at Wilbut the entire time that they spoke.

But what the fuck was he doing here?

"Well, I wasn't planning to. But I got a text from Purpled saying he was staying the night at friends that just felt off so I thought I'd come over and make sure everything was okay. His text just didn't quite seem right." Punz said with a shrug. "I went through to the backyard because he mentioned he was taking a break out here so I could check in on him and then your friend tried to bite me."

"Yeah, Tommy does that sometimes." Tubbo said, nodding sagely and Tommy scowled at him. He only bit people for a good reason because he had been blessed with an awesome power and must use it. "Not a problem, he's not rabid at all."

"I could be." Tommy said, scowling harder as Punz let him go. Punz could have been a wrongun! Only wronguns just walked into people's backyards! But Tubbo sent him a sweet smile, the one that meant he needed to set up an alibi and people believed the stuttery curly haired boy easily.

Right, alibi. Because there was no way Punz could take Purpled away. The man would probably get absolutely slaughtered by the mer when they came to kill them. Or maybe not, Tommy wondered, looking at the other. Punz must be pretty strong with how he had easily held him.

Speaking of which, where was Purpled? If his brother was here, he had expected the other to wander his way in and eye roll at stuff. Tommy may like Purpled but there was no doubting that the other had even more compacted sass than Tubbo and Tommy hadn't been certain that was physically possible prior to meeting Purpled.

He sidled to the side, scanning the backyard. The divot had been filled but the hose had been flung across the porch. Weird. How excited had Purpled been to see his brother? It laid at an odd angle and with surprise, Tommy finally saw Purpled.

They were staring up at the full moon, wandering aimlessly around the backyard. Every time they reached a fence, they bounced off of it with a small cry that tugged Tommy's heartstrings as soon as he realized Purpled was the one who made it. Finally, fish brain sat up and took notice. Even if it was to coo about him wrapping Purpled up in a hug and assuring his hatchmate that they were safe.

He glanced back, but Tubbo was still spinning his story for Punz and clearly hadn't seen Purpled yet. Tommy shrugged. Whatever. He sidled off, careful to keep his footsteps light as he walked up to the other. They were pressed against the fence, staring up at the moon still. They didn't look at him.

"Purpled?" Tommy said, reaching out to shake the other's shoulder. They didn't look injured. He didn't know much medical stuff outside of first aid for when bullies got a lucky hit, but he didn't see any blood or other stuff.

But Purpled's eyes were practically glowing as he stared up, over Tommy's shoulder. Vibrant and dark violet, focused on one point only. "We need to go back." He said, his voice hissing softly. "We have to go back now."

"Back fucking where? To the porch?" Tommy said, glancing behind him, He staggered back as Purpled walked forward into him, shuffling with the weight. "What the fuck are you doing? Are you high?"

"Mako is calling me. It wants us home." Purpled said insistently, starting to push against Tommy. But Tommy grabs his arms, breath beginning to speed up. Something wasn't right here. "The full moon is so pretty. So pretty. Even prettier on the island. Need to go back."

"I don't think that's a good idea." Tommy insisted, now really weirded out. Purpled was bitchy and stubborn but smart as a whip when he wanted to be with a dry sense of humor that made Tommy snicker, even when it was directed at him. He didn't- he didn't look quite so-jittery. Happy, but in a too calm kind of way.

Tommy turned around, trying to signal to Tubbo that something was definitely off. Purpled sounded like he had been straight up drugged. And like a bolt of lightning when he met Tubbo's eyes, it hit him.

And in a split second, Tommy can see Tubs connect the same dots that he did. The fallen hose, Purpled's weird behavior. Punz showing up in their backyard without anyone noticing because who lets themselves into the yard in a person's house that they don't know?

Because Tommy may not be the fastest thinker but he could remember what Purpled said during their little powwow.

I told Punz not to come fishing because I'm with friends today so he's out and my parents... are out too.

Not once did he ever say that Punz was his brother. And who only talked to their brother while fishing? And never once did Purpled mention he was still texting the other because Purpled could be a bit of a stone cold bitch but Tommy knew like he knew himself that Purpled would have mentioned this.

Because he hadn't. And he had never told Punz he was in the backyard and Punz hadn't decided not to disturb them out of awkwardness when he went around the side. Punz had wanted to make sure that they couldn't see him when he went into the backyard and did something to Purpled. Punz had reeled back when Tommy had been reaching for the firework and he didn't think it was just surprise, the way the other had protected his eyes.

Because he had to be a mer.

And he saw the moment Punz moved, clearly knowing something was wrong. Tommy cursed, scrambling to get his fireworks but then Purpled lunged and he was desperately trying to corral the other and gods fucking damnit, he could really use angry Purpled right now.

Tubbo threw a firework into Punz's face, trying to dive under his outstretched arm. Punz reeled back with a swear, just snagging the collar of Tubbo's sweater. "Grab the hose!" Tubbo whisper yelled and Tommy lobbed the popper, darting across the yard to get the hose. He rolled bringing it up just in time to see Punz swing Tubbo around to face Ranboo and Fundy who had just ran in.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you." Punz said evenly, hands firmly on Tubbo's shoulders. The fireworks had fallen to the ground, just out of Tubbo's reach. Tommy darted forward and dragged Purpled back, cursing as he was forced to drop the fireworks to keep hold. For someone who sounded like he was on drugs, Purpled was surprisingly wriggly.

"Let him go." Ranboo said firmly, stepping forward. He was only holding a piece of chalk but the look on his face said that he was willing to put it through Punz's eye.

"I'm not going to do that." Punz said. He shifted his hands, expertly dodging Tubbo's snapping teeth. "I know for a fact that you're not going to do anything to me, not when I have a hold of your friend here."

"I got a hose, bitch." Tommy shot back, raising it threateningly. He was pretty sure his weird insta drying trick would still work here and then Tubbo would be safe and sound and Punz would be a fish out of water! "I'll spray you, don't think I won't. We're not afraid of a little water."

"Water's good." Purpled mumbled, a warm weight against Tommy's side. Far too distracting and he gritted his teeth. He needed to make sure Purpled was okay but he needed to get Punz away from Tubbo. This was worse than having to juggle his many wives and hot girlfriends.

“You’re not afraid of the water.” Punz said evenly and Tommy stepped in front of Purpled, trying to block the other from Punz’s gaze. “You’re afraid of what I did to your friend. So I say you’re going to put that down and come with me and I’ll leave your red headed friend alive.”

Tommy gritted his teeth and decided his grip was most definitely not shaking. He knew exactly what he was doing. But he had no idea what Punz had done to Purpled before they came here. “You fucking drugged him, that’s what you did. You hurt him.”

And weirdly, Punz looks incredibly offended at the very thought of it. “I would never hurt Purpled, he’s my little brother.” Punz said, shaking his head. Tommy stared at him and for once swear words failed him because there were none that could deeply encapsulate how fucked up Punz apparently was. “Why would I ever do that?”

“Right, I don’t give a fuck.” Tommy declared, gesturing at Fundy to turn on the spigot. “Either let him go, or I’m going to spray you and leave you here.

“And here I hoped it would be easier. I should have never expected anything less from Purpled and his friends. I should have taken them up on their offer to get back up for the initial meeting.” Punz said, looking disappointed. Tommy brought the hose up and sprayed but Punz dodged, far too effortlessly considering how he was dragging a struggling Tubbo.

And with one good movement, he pulled Tubbo’s head back so the other looked up to the sky. And Tommy’s heart stopped as he thought the other had snapped Tubbo’s neck as Tubbo suddenly stopped struggling and oh fuck Tubbo was fucking dead-

“Oh.” Tubbo whispered and it was like someone had dropped a nuke onto the backyard and something in his chest loosened with relief. Ranboo scrambled forward, trying to dodge Punz and grab Tubbo. Tommy tried to help, aiming the hose on Punz’s feet to try and get him to back off but why wasn’t Tubbo struggling what was wrong the other was just standing there, letting Punz drag him-

“Tubbo!” Tommy cried and miraculously, Tubbo finally looked back down at him but it was wrong, so fucking wrong. Because Tubbo’s warm brown eyes were practically eclipsed by dark pupils that seemed to shine in the light of the backyard. All the paranoia and clever planning was still there but- sideways.

Like Purpled.

“It’s the moon!” Fundy yelled, catching on first. Tommy scoffed because what the fuck did the moon have to do with it? The moon couldn’t fucking drug people or he would have been riding a high every night. “Don’t look at it! That’s why they’re acting so weird.”

He nearly glanced up before catching himself. Purpled’s tugs had become increasingly strong, mumbling how he needed to get back to the island and it was taking everything Tommy had to keep Punz off of Ranboo. If it was true, then he’d knock himself out like a fucking light.

But that didn't mean he liked the ache of not knowing, of seeing Tubbo get dragged like a doll, calm as a lamb in Punz's hands. He shook Purpled with his free hand. "Wake up, we fucking need you here right now." Tommy snapped. "Or Punz is going to take us."

"He said he'll take us to the island though." Purpled said and the hint of a whine to his voice was so bizarre that it took Tommy a few seconds to compute it. "He's safe. He feels safe."

"Listen to him." Punz said and Tommy wanted to fucking bite that man. Mer. Whatever.

"He's not fucking safe!" Tommy corrected harshly. He had already fallen for that trick like a moron with Wilbur and he knew for a fact that the mer were never safe even if they felt that way. "I- fuck, look, I'll take you to the island but you need to help me first."

"Want to go now." Purpled insisted. Tommy gritted his teeth. He heard a warcry as Fundy started pelting Punz with poppers but the other couldn't hit hard, too worried by Tubbo, they had to get him away from Punz. "Want to go, safe there, nest there."

Fucking- nest there? But even as part of his mind revolted at the thought, he couldn't help but long for it too. The pool had always been so nice and safe, deep in the cave where no one could reach them. Their untouched sanctuary from the asshole mer and when Purpled said that, he couldn't shake the thought.

Of the four of them going back there and just, hiding in the pool. Curl up together in a little puppy pile, like the ones he had with Tubbo but even better because Purpled and Ranboo would be there and sleep knowing he was secure. Tommy shook the picture away. The moonlight must be affecting him more than he thought it would, he thought with a grimace.

"Hand the hose to me." Ranboo said, popping up at his side. The other was jittering, face looking towards the water. He looked terrified but kept reaching for it anyways. "I have an idea, I think I did something down there with Techno and I'm gonna try it again."

"That weird trick?" Tommy said, because he remembered that. He remembered how the water had seemed to freeze around Ranboo, how solid crystals had crept over his scales. Impossible considering they were in the middle of a fucking jungle but Ranboo hadn't seemed to care a single bit.

"Right." Ranboo said. He took a deep breath before snatching the hose away and Tommy slung a now free hand around the struggling Purpled. The gate was still open and he was not letting this bitch run off and get yinked.

Next time Purpled complained about doing free work, Tommy was going to rub this in his face so goddamn hard. At least he hadn't gotten drugged by the fucking moon of all things.

"It's going to be- fuck, just chill alright." Tommy said. He barely kept the other from stepping into the water. Purpled didn't seem to care that he would transform when he hit the water anymore, in fact, it almost seemed like he was magnetized to it. Dragging Tommy forward. "DON'T YOU FUCKING DARE!"

“Why not?” Purpled complained. “Why don’t you change too! It is so much more comfortable when we’re all changed. Just go in the water.”

Tommy gritted his teeth, pulling Purpled back just in time. Ranboo brought the house, expertly aiming for Punz’s feet. There was a soft crackling sound and Tommy watched as Punz yelled, suddenly stuck in place. And the effect continued, tracing up the water coming from the hose until Tommy reached up and smacked it out of Ranboo’s hands.

“Thanks.” Ranboo said, letting out a ragged gasp. Tommy shoved Purpled into his arms, beelining over to where Punz was cursing, working away at his feet. Tommy tried to ignore how the other’s hands were wreathed in blue, the way the ice was slowly chipping away. He took a deep breath, reaching out for Tubbo.

“That was fun.” Tubbo said with a far too happy hum but he beamed when he saw Tommy. “Tommy! Did you hear Punz is taking us back to the ocean?”

Tommy fought the urge to grimace, it was hard to look at Tubbo so happy and know what he shouldn’t be, not at fucking all. Because this- this wasn’t Tubbo, this was purely the fishbrain side of him. “Not right now, we’ve got wives to deal with it.” He said, grabbing onto Tubbo’s hands and looking at his feet. They were frozen like Punz’s were, but it shouldn’t overlap.

Tommy concentrated hard, trying to draw upon the light and warmth he felt before. It was harder this time, like he was pushing on a locked door, until something seemed to respond to his clumsy pushes and give way. He glared as his eyes locked with blue ones.

“You’re not getting away from me. I’ve never lost something I set on getting, not money, not jewels, not my little brother and his hatchmates.” Punz said, something dangerous about his eyes. Tommy wrapped himself around Tubbo, refusing to let the other dart out of the back yard.

“Well, get used to it, bitch.” He snapped, dragging Tubbo away to where Fundy was frantically pacing on the porch. Ranboo was speaking quickly to Purpled, looking worried. “I- fuck, Tubbo, chill- how do we fix them?”

“I don’t know.” Fundy said, groaning in frustration as he tugged on his curls. He turned to Tommy, holding out a short length of rope. “I can tie them to your wrists for now to try and slow them down if they escape your grip, but this? No clue.”

“I thought you were supposed to be the expert here!” Tommy whisper yelled. He was supposed to know all about this! But he didn’t struggle when the order reached forward, even if it hurt to hear the twin whines as the rope and he could hear Punz’s struggles double. How long would that ice hold anyways? “And what do you mean, the moon? How did the moon do this to them?”

“It’s a best guess, considering Punz forced Tubbo to look at the sky. I- you’ve seemed a bit more weirdly hyped tonight but I thought that’s because you slept or something.”

“I think he’s right.” Ranboo interjected. “I’ve been feeling a bit more- not energetic but just... Aware? Like, the fish side is louder all the sudden and I have all this energy to go do

something. I don't know man, this is weird."

"They've been asking to go to the pool, right?" And Tubbo frantically nodded, mumbling about going to the pool. "Maybe it's some kind of connection because of the full moon's role in the magic? Or it might be just a general mer pup thing? Nothing in our notes ever said anything about this."

"The pool, huh?"

And Tommy froze because that voice wasn't one of them and it wasn't Punz. He slowly turned, looking at the backyard gate they had foolishly left open.

He looked like he could be any old person walking down the street. Strange in his white and green robe and matching bucket hat, but the blond hair and blue eyes just screamed old suburban dad. And Tommy could have almost believed it if it wasn't for Wilbur and Techno standing behind him, Wilbur sending him a jaunty little wave that turned his stomach. A seagull screeched.

The man's eyes met his. "Hi mate." He said and there was something soft and delighted in his eyes. "It's so good to finally meet you. You came from that old thing, huh?"

Tommy turned and bolted to the door, lugging Tubbo with him. A flimsy defense but both sides of his brain were screaming in fear. Ranboo barely beat him there but the door opened a half step before it and it was only because of Tubbo digging his heels in that Tommy didn't crash straight into him.

"Oh, it's Schlatt again." Tubbo hummed. And the man looked different in a suit and tie but Tommy could easily recognize the messy brown hair that almost looked like curling horns. There was no fear in Tubbo's words, just a bland and light sort of curiosity like he was greeting an old acquaintance. "Hi."

"Hi, kid." Schlatt drawled and Tommy glared, trying to put himself between Tubbo and the other.

"Don't talk to him." He spat. First, Purpled was drugged and now Tubbo and now these bitches had shown up. Trapped between bitch number one and bitch number two. And judging by the shifting shadows behind Schlatt in the doorway, he hadn't come alone either. There was a soft crackle of ice breaking and his heart dipped lower.

This night had been going so fucking well. But his name wasn't Tommy Danger Innit for nothing.

He'd get them out of this.

And there's the moonstruck situation! I really enjoyed writing this and it was nice tweaking it to my AU. Tubbo and Purpled are still themselves, but it's overridden by their instincts and the magic of the pool calling them back.

I'll explain it more later on, but yes, full moons can effect natural pups as well, they just lack the siren call to the Mako pool and the effects are far lighter, just making them a little bit more clingy. It's usually used to keep mischievous pups in line during the full moon. Punz was not expecting Purpled to drop that hard into his instincts but he's not complaining.

Under the Weather

Chapter Notes

For so long, I have been waiting for this.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“The pool, huh?” The old man said and Ranboo could almost hear how Tommy’s teeth ground at the sound. But it was hard to focus, his eyes kept jumping around, trying to keep an eye on everything and everyone. There were so many people here and they were all staring at him and hoo boy, there was that anxiety rearing its head again.

He tried to anchor himself by holding onto Purpled’s hands but it was hard because Purpled felt like he was a million miles away. He still wasn’t looking at him, alternately looking up at the moon or at the mer penning them in. If it wasn’t for how he pressed into his side, he would have thought Purpled had forgotten he was there.

“You know it.” Ranboo said, trying to keep his hands from fidgeting because he needed to keep a hold of Purpled. He didn’t want to let go because part of him was terrified he’d never see Purpled again.

“Of course I know that old thing, mate! I’ve been trying to get it to work again for so long!” The old man said, and oooo fuck, Ranboo did not like the sound of that. Because that meant- that gory story Fundy had told was true.

Ranboo never thought he’d prefer a good old fashioned serial killer story over a conspiracy theory.

These people standing in front of them had killed a lot of people. In what sounded like horribly painful ways and they had never gotten caught. Would never get caught, a darker voice reminded him, because who would believe those old stories were the work of killer mermaids? Who would believe killer mermaids would kidnap people?

The politician- Schlatt and oh fuck was that weird- scoffed.

Because Ranboo knew Schlatt! Well, he knew of him. He had never met him, but when he heard the name, he could vividly remember hearing his parents talking about trying to work with him. Unlike most, Schlatt was one of the few politicians who they didn’t even like working with because he didn’t just look the other way for some wine and dining or a small party thrown in his honor.

Which was why Ranboo didn’t exactly have a good feeling about their chances. He didn’t think that they would screwed but he, uh, wasn’t feeling too confident! The faucet was still leaking water by his feet, maybe if he could pick it up and move fast enough-

Even the thought of it made his hands shake. It was a hose! He shouldn't be that scared of it! It shouldn't matter that the water was fast and cold and now he knew it could most definitely hurt him and haha that's great for a phobia!

"Fucking hell, I actually forgot about that old thing! Thought you were having us on and it didn't work anymore." Schlatt said and Ranboo risked a peek back, seeing the other with folded arms. Judging by the way the green haired guy behind him was smiling, he didn't like their chances of going through the house. Right. Hm. "Figured the rumors were right and old man Philza actually had gone senile."

"I'm not old!" Bucket hat guy said and oh, this must be Philza! He could hear the cackling of the sea gulls that were gathered on the roof and the thought of that nearly made Ranboo do a double take. Did sea gulls just do that? Maybe? He had no clue, he hated them ever since one chased him down the beach until he sacrificed his sandwich to it, only to have it chase him home. "Don't you go on about that Schlatt or I'll start losing my patience with your pod."

He didn't know if Tommy caught it but he could see how Schlatt stiffened. Whoever Philza was, even with how understated they were in their outfit, they had to be some sort of major danger. His hands tightened on Purpled, prompting the other to look back at him, still tugging softly. At least when the mer had shown up, Tubbo and Purpled had seemed to calm a bit. Ish.

"It figures, the one century we all decide to stop putting people in it, it fucking works." Wilbur announced, sending an extra shiver down Ranboo's spine. The fish brain didn't know how it felt about Wilbur but Ranboo sure did, remembering the other leaning over him with a toothy grin. Wilbur would have absolutely eaten him and felt nothing. "Four, because don't think I didn't hear what happened here Punz. Four itsy bitsy pups!"

"Four." Philza echoed, and a hushed silence filled the yard. "I never thought I'd see it."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Punz said, calm and relaxed like he wasn't the lone guy surrounded by what had to be rival mer? Did mers have rivals? Fuck. "There's just three."

"Three? I thought there were two?" Schlatt said and Ranboo let out a nervous little giggle, pulling closer to Tommy. Schlatt's eyes darted between the four of them, narrowing. "Oh, that makes things more clear. Tricky kids."

It sounds almost proud.

Fundy shuffled back slightly and Ranboo's eyes darted towards him and then away. Why wasn't the other helping? Shouldn't there be something they could do?

"I told you there was something about the tall boy." That had to be the gold and black mer behind him as well and Ranboo shuddered. The other was staring at him, a little smirk on his face and he was relieved when Tommy shouldered in front of him, glaring at the other.

"Techno took an interest in him and that meant that something had to be up."

"Watch yourself, Quackity." Techno rumbled. Oh, that must be his name. Ranboo was forgetting things again and fuck, this was not the time for that. He really didn't want to have

his unreliable memory messing him up right now. “Or you’ll be finding yourself with a few new scars to add to your collection.”

“You pig-”

“Boys, boys.” Philza said, holding out his hands. There was something sharp about his smile. His teeth didn’t look quite right in the light. Like a shark, waiting to pounce. “Tall one, yes, you must be the pup Techno said, little green pup right there, and the purpled eyed kid. But I’m afraid I haven’t heard of you yet.”

And he looked directly at Tommy who was already starting to snarl. “Oi, fu-”

“Wait, no, but that’s Tommy! I told you about Tommy!” Wilbur protested and Philza was looking confused and Ranboo took the chance to lean into Tommy. He could feel the tension lining the other’s frame.

“They don’t care.” He whispered and Tommy side eyed him with a frown. Ranboo scrambled to clarify. “This isn’t about us, this is them- play fighting? Talking intimidation? I’m not sure. But they could care less what we have to say right now.”

He had seen it done before, when he got dragged along to those terrible dinners. No one really cared what he had to say, his parents spoke enough for the both of him. The conversation plodded merrily long without him. But the heavier feeling in the air was starting to increase and something had him on edge. Usually, those awful dinners didn’t devolve into violence. But he was pretty sure that this one would.

“I’m not gonna go without a fight.” Tommy snarled back. Ranboo shook his head quickly. He didn’t want to either. This- it was terrifying. With just a quick glance, Punz had Tubbo and Purpled like putty. “Fuck these guys.”

“I know, I’m just saying. I don’t think we can talk our way out of this.” And from the way Tommy’s eyes darted to him and then away, he knew the other understood.

“No, I was told about the kid with the purple eyes.” Philza said, gesturing at Purpled and Ranboo tried to shift in front of him but it was far harder with how Purpled kept trying to tug away so he could head for the gate. “Mate, look, either way, there are four pups. We can get into the confusion later.”

“If we look at the moon, we’re done.” Ranboo reminded him. He glanced at Fundy, frowning when he realized the other was half hiding, angled away from the mer. Wasn’t he supposed to be helping them right now? Why was he hiding like this? Like yeah, he sure wanted to hide too but he couldn’t because that meant Tommy, Tubbo, and Purpled would be abandoned. He focused on Tommy, trying to distract himself from the terrifying conversation.

“I can still fuck ‘em up.” Tommy said. But when Techno took a step forward, Tommy joined Ranboo in taking a step back. Ranboo could almost feel the pain in his ankle worsening, remembering how the other had squeezed even as Techno’s eyes looked at him and softened into something that could be called protective.

(He also remembered how the other had held him. Like Ranboo was the most precious treasure in the world just for existing. Something to be protected and cherished, no matter if he stumbled and fell and wasn't a big business shark. Like he was theirs and that scared and confused him as much as the memory stuck with him.)

"Fuck off! Don't come any closer! I will fuck you up." Tommy snarled, practically spitting fire. "I'll beat you so badly your wives won't be able to tell who you were but nope, I bet you don't even have any wives! You're just alone! Ranboo, tell 'em!"

"Go away?" Ranboo tried. Oh, this was going so badly sideways. They really needed Tubbo and Purpled here with them and not distracted with what the full moon had done to them. His attempt at intimidation was quickly ruined by Tubbo running into him, making a happy little trill that made Ranboo slump just a teensy bit but also not because gah, he could not handle fishbrain emotions and actual emotions right now. "Uh, yeah. No, we're not going with you."

And Ranboo hadn't thought it was possible for him to be even more terrified! But apparently his strung nerves hadn't quite given out yet because Philza- Philza just cooed. Really. He made this soft, utterly alien and yet not, cooing sound that made Ranboo want to fall right over and run away at the exact same time.

"Aw, that's adorable. You were right when you said they're a feisty little nest of pups. I guess the pool answers so much about you, you never had a pod to teach you what to do or a nest to rest in." Philza said with a soft little smile. "Trying to take on all the roles but you can't do them yet, huh mate? Trying to guard your nest?"

"Bitch." Tommy snarled and Ranboo risked a glance down at the hose, trying to make himself grab it like he did before. His hands were shaking too hard, and he was about to tear Purpled's hoodie with how tightly he was holding onto it. "I'm not a child."

"But you are." Wilbur said firmly. And Ranboo had a good feeling whatever nonexistent timer they had been on, it had just ran out. "And not having a pod means there's no one we'll have to kill off to claim you as ours. You're free game."

"Now, now, don't go getting ahead of yourself." Schlatt interjected. Ranboo shuffles in place, catching Tommy's eye. For all his bravado, the other looks unsure where to go as well. Trapped under the eave of the porch, Schlatt's group blocking the way into the house and Philza's blocking the gate. They could run for the fence but could they try climbing it in time? Could they all get past Punz? "I claimed them. The kids are mine and I'll be taking them with me. This is my territory.."

"As if they would go with you, you washed up-" Wilbur made a sharp sound that felt deeply insulting somehow. Techno moved forward, a terrifying grin splitting his face. And between them, Punz watched. "And as far as I know, your territory doesn't extend onto the island, only near it."

"Better than the bastardo who nearly killed a pup." Quackity taunted and Wilbur's face shaded bright red. Philza stood straight, his bucket hat casting a shadow across his face. "The pups are ours. They'll be far safer in our nest."

“The island’s neutral but even so, I think you’re getting ahead of yourself mate.” Philza said, all the warmth there when he cooed at them suddenly gone.

“I think you’ll find.” A teasing voice broke in. And Ranboo stiffened because he didn’t recognize that voice and yet it was close- “That the pups are ours.”

And then something snagged Ranboo’s collar and *pulled*.

Ranboo let out a shrill yelp as he was yanked straight up, the porch eaves, a hysterical part of his mind added. He had been standing under them and he hadn’t expected someone to be above them. His hold on Purpled shifted, slid-

A hand so dark as to be black reached past Ranboo, snagging Purpled and pulling him up. He didn’t have a chance to be relieved before he was tumbling into someone’s arms, hearing Tommy’s howls of rage.

But they didn’t hold a candle to when he glanced down and caught sight of Philza’s and Schlatts’s faces and thought, *Oh. That’s what people mean when they say frozen with anger.* But if they looked mad, Techno looked apocalyptic. Punz barely dodged his attack, easily vaulting up the side of the house and landing on top.

Fundy froze, standing on the grass below, and the sight was so familiar that it nearly made Ranboo’s heart stop. He had to force himself to look away before it brought up bad memories.

He barely caught sight of a man with electric blue hair racing out of the house before whoever had him started backing away and Ranboo realized that he should probably stop freezing up.

Where were his (hatchmates) friends?

“Let go?” Ranboo said, trying to struggle but holy fuck this guy was tall. And that was coming from him who had been the tallest guy in school for years. Ranboo was actually short next to him and that was bizarre to think about. They scooped him into their arms like he weighed nothing and that was- that was-

It felt like every moment came in flashes. Tommy thrashing in the arms of someone wearing a diving mask, their dark green hair the only easy feature to see. Tubbo horribly limp in the arms of someone wearing a lime green hoodie. Purpled being passed to Punz who took him oh so carefully. And the person holding him didn’t even move when Ranboo pushed and shoved and tried to go for his eyes. They had to be the hand, their skin so dark that only black could be used to describe it.

“Dream!” He heard Techno roar before someone vaulted up on the roof, the lime green guy laughing as he spun away and started running. Ranboo screamed, eyes locking with Tommy who was struggling but it didn’t even look like he was making a mark- “You’re dead this time!”

“Hijo de puta-“ Something gold whizzed by and heat burst from the end of the roof when Tommy tried to light his captor on fire only to strike- whatever the gold was.

Ranboo thinks he’s starting to hyperventilate.

A seagull swooped down at him, screaming defiance, and Ranboo paused his escape to throw his arms up, barely seeing how the temperature plummeted and frost lined his cuffs before-

Darkness.

Light.

Ranboo let out a croaking gasp, head spinning as they stepped out. He recognized that bush. It was a few blocks down from Fundy’s house. How far had they taken him and how so fast?

“Oh, muffin, are you okay?” The other said and the hold on him shifted, the other reaching up to check his forehead. “I know that can be rough the first time but I can’t make it more gentle than that and it’s better than getting stuck in the middle of a rampage. Goodness, for how old they are, you would think they’d know better than to do that around pups.”

“Let go, man!” Ranboo said, his voice jerking up a few octaves. His chest heaved for oxygen he couldn’t find and it was a stray thought that had his eyes flickering away before he could see the full moon. The grip of the other was like Techno, as hard as iron but he couldn’t feel the water nearby to freeze, thrashing uselessly.

“It’s okay, shush, you’re safe.” The other cooed. It was almost horrifying, seeing those far too pale eyes against dark skin. He didn’t even have any pupils, eyes a white void. “My name is Bad, I’m not going to hurt you but we need to get you far away from here before the others show. Oh, muffin, can one of you bring one of the pups over? He’s not going to settle without his hatchmate.”

“Over here.” Someone called and with a horrible yank, Ranboo felt himself be yanked through the weird shadow void again, spitting him out in front of the guy in the lime hoodie. And for a moment, Ranboo thought they were even more inhuman than Bad, the shadow guy, but nope that was- a mask?

Okay, Ranboo would like to go to sleep right now and wake up to find out that this was a horrible nightmare and he was tucked cozily at home or maybe having a sleepover with his friends in a nice safe house and not here. That would be absolutely fantastic.

(How tempting it was, to consider looking up at the moon. Tubbo didn’t look like himself but he was almost giddily happy, even held captive in the other’s arms. Calm and relaxed, alternating between asking to go back to the pool, go into the water, or requests to see Ranboo. Would he be that calm if he just looked up?)

“That’ll make it harder to run around freely.” The lime green guy said, moving forward. Ranboo couldn’t take his eyes away from Tubbo who didn’t seem to care that he had been picked up. “Can’t you just make him look up at the moon? My pup is so much easier.”

“No!” Ranboo said and the temperature plummeted, making Bad yelp as ice crystals curled up their arms. Something inside his head popped and Ranboo slumped, gasping for air and feeling like he had run a marathon. That had been exhausting. But better than leaving Tommy on his own.

If he still is conscious, that mean little voice whispered snidely. Maybe he was the last one left. It was hard to hear Tommy’s likely yelling over the screech of seagulls and hte slightly more inhuman screeches that made him want to curl up and hide because here was too exposed.

“Aw, did you tucker yourself out already?” Dream said, tilting his head. Ranboo wheezed, trying to shift. What was that? “Nice, elemental. You’ll fit in fantastic. I knew you’d be perfect for us and I got a game out of it. But I still think the moon’s better here.”

“Don’t be silly Dream. If you want to earn a pup’s trust, you can’t just go causing them to get moonstruck. It’s not the best start to a positive caregiver relationship if they can’t trust that you’ll defend them.” Bad said with a sniff. Dream. The name sounded familiar somehow but Ranboo wasn’t exactly sure from where. “And that requires demonstrations.”

“Well, right now, the priority is getting back into our territory before the others catch us. Philza’s little sky rats are already out.” Despite his annoyed tone, his body language said that he was incredibly excited, practically hopping up and down. Except when he stopped to glare at a seagull for some reason? He tilted his head to the side. “I- fuck. Sam said that he’s scrapping with Wilbur, the audio interference isn’t working as well as he wanted. I’m sending Sapnap. Punz is fine, but Charlie is sliming up everything.”

“Why can’t you leave us alone.” Ranboo broke in and he hated the hysterical edge to his voice but it felt so so true. Why did they keep chasing them like this? Why couldn’t they leave them alone to live their lives? How long were they going to have to deal with this?

“Ranboo, calm downnnnn.” Tubbo whined and it didn’t help, Ranboo making a fearful chirp that made his heart thud even faster as the alien chirp slipped out.

“Leave you alone? Why would we do that?” Bad said. “I know it seems a little scary right now but I promise, as foolish as they are, the others wouldn’t hurt you when they get caught up in a fight. You’re perfectly safe. We’ll get you back to the ocean and you’ll calm right down.”

And Tubbo cheered. Cheered at being kidnapped.

“Techno will be coming this way soon, I’ll lead him on a merry little chase.” Dream said, bouncing and Ranboo’s head jerked up. He had a good feeling that if Dream took Tubbo away right now, he wouldn’t be seeing them again. Not until they were in the ocean and he had already lost Purpled and Tubbo. “I want this over before Philza loses his patience and pulls some magic bullshit and ruins the chase.”

“No!” He yelled, scrambling in Bad’s arms to try and reach Tubbo. And mercifully, Tubbo reached back, briefly throwing Dream off balance. Bad made a sad whistle.

“Oh, see, now you’ve gone and made them sad.” He cooed, pressing hand to Ranboo’s head. “There, there, you’re alright! I know Dream is being a mean muffin head right now but I promise you’ll see your hatchmate again soon! But I’m not letting Techno- or Connor.” He turned and glared into the darkness. “Get you.”

But the turn let Ranboo see something more important. People, who in any other circumstances he would have hated to see, loitering at the end of the street. They were turned away from him but- A shred of bravery hit, a crippling desire to see his friends and finish his copy of the sunday comics and the new horror movie soundtrack was coming out next week and he was not going to miss it.

“HEY! CLAY! BITCH! YOU’RE A COWARDLY WIMP!” He yelled down the street. “I BET THAT, UH, ALCOHOL YOU DRANK KILLED ALL YOUR BRAIN CELLS. YOU’D BE FIRST TO DIE IN A HORROR MOVIE.”

Okay, not the best but he really didn’t have much to work with. Clay turned with a glare, swaggering up the street with his stupid friends behind him. “Aw, ickle Ranboo feeling safe with his friends backing him up?” He sneered. “Gotta be carried like a baby?”

In Tubbo’s words, a distraction.

Dream went as taught as a live wire. “Really.” He hissed. “Bad, take him to the rendezvous along the coast. I’m not going to let him be exposed to a bunch of prey like this. Not even worth chasing.”

“If you wanted them dead, you just had to say so.” And Ranboo felt the familiar tug and pull of the shadow void. But this time, he refused to freeze, reaching out and snagging Tubbo’s wrist. He refused to let go, even as the shadows closed in around him, feeling the warmth of Tubbo’s wrist in his hands.

When they step out this time, he falls.

He can hear Bad wheezing behind him as he rolls in the sand and oh, there’s Tubbo there on the ground. Tubbo here in his arms and when he turns, it’s to the sight of Bad staggering to his feet, black skin paling. Dream was nowhere in sight. Ranboo hadn’t known that there was a limit to what Bad could do, all he had wanted was for Tubbo to come with them. But, hey, he’d take it.

“Dad!” He heard someone yell, and Ranboo pushed Tubbo aside, trying to protect him. Someone dressed in white and black raced past, leaning over Bad. “What the fuck? Did one of them get you?”

“Fine, Sapnap.” Bad gasped. “Just, too much, too quickly. I need to breathe for a moment.”

“Boo!” And that was a voice Ranboo did recognize. His head jerked up and he could feel the blood drain from his face. Because that was Tommy, his face a mask of incandescent fury as he lay in a tide pool, Purpled happily splashing next to him. Punz and the green haired one, who must be Sam, were standing over the tide pool. Sam’s arms were out, pushing Tommy gently back in.

He never thought he'd want to see Tommy's scales again or Purpled's violet but at least that meant they were alive. Tubbo tugged at his grip, pulling him forward. "We should join them." Tubbo said, his eyes bright in the moonlight. "The water looks so nice."

"I can't." Ranboo said, his voice tight. And that finally, finally gets a reaction. Tubbo frowns, the hazy calm slipping, just slightly, into worry again. "I can't."

The thought of getting back into the water- He couldn't do it. It was like every fear of his had been turned up to eleven and then maximized.

"Hello, everybody!" Someone chirped behind them and Ranboo's frayed nerves couldn't even muster a fearful groan anymore. It was the guy with the bright green hair, slime dripping from his hands as he grinned. Behind him loomed the other mer, the one that was electric blue. "It's slime time."

"Oh, god damn it. We're winning this fair and square." Sapnap complained. "Stop it with the stupid slime!"

"Definitely not." The one who wasn't Charlie said, cracking his knuckles and bouncing on his toes. "Let's do this then, we have five minutes before Wilbur realizes we left slime doubles to fight him off."

A musical scream ripped through the air. "Or one." Charlie said thoughtfully. "Fun!"

And against his better judgment, Ranboo turns, fleeing to the pool, to where the others were. He hesitates at the outskirts but Tubbo doesn't hesitate before throwing himself in, beelining into Purpled with a small laugh. Tommy glares up at him.

"I'm going to kill them." He snarls. Ranboo finds himself staring down at the water, shaking. Tommy makes a nervous sound, worried. "You, fuck why couldn't Tubbo be here, Ranboo I need you here with me right now. They're distracted right now and I need you."

Yes. Distracted. He could do this. Sam and Punz had left the pool and the shadows were moving like they were alive, trying to catch a streak of electric blue that moved like lightning. They could escape, if they could pry Tubbo and Purpled out. He leaned down, offering his hand.

The music hit him first.

"Don't go! Come back here! Pup, return to me, you're not leaving- Techno, get them!"

In any other circumstance, he would have called Wilbur's music beautiful instead, his brain lights up like a live wire and Ranboo topples into the pool with a choked chirp of fear. He wants to go, he wants to stay, and warmth holds him fast and he can hear Tommy rambling into his ear, trying to bring him back even as the other shakes under the weight of the conflicting commands.

"You, fuck, you're okay, we're going to get out of this and go back to that stupid house and I'm going to make fun of you for the way you make tea because it is such a bullshit method

and then we're going to watch a dumb comedy movie and play minecraft and it is all going to be good, I promise, it's going to be good-"

"Ranboo?" Scaled hands graze his face, Purpled's eyes wide and frills flared as Tubbo crowds his other side. Behind them, he can see Fundy and an unfamiliar red haired woman racing down the beach. Ranboo chokes on a sob, all the stress and fear hitting him at once.

Above them, the full moon hit its zenith as mer warred on the beach and the four pups reached for each other. Ranboo can almost feel the energy in him surge again, meeting three identical surges, all of them reacting out of fear and wanting to protect.

Waves surged, the air screamed as it sharpened into a hurricane force gale, and the sky opened up, sending down lightning and hail. In moments, the clear night goes to a storm.

Chapter End Notes

Not seen, the Mers' internal screaming when they count that there are four pups. We're coming back to that later.

Me? Referencing Snow King by having Dream carry Tubbo? It's more likely than you would think.

I'm thinking of starting an outtake and extras add on fic soon! I've got some scenes and POVs I want to write that don't fit cleanly into WTWRR like Wilbur and Tommy's day out, maybe Punz and Purpled's actual first meeting, Dad!(by mer standards, human standards, Tommy is going feral)Sam wrangling Tommy to the beach, some POVs from mer and outsiders, etc. Maybe a few of my canon divergence ideas for this AU. Would you guys like that?

I've just been busy lately with life and other projects (I'm crocheting a blanket!) so I haven't brought it up before.

Bad Moon Rising

Chapter Notes

The not so good time continues!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tommy pushed back into the water, breathing quick as he stared into the storm around them. It was fucking.... Huge. He didn't have words for what he was seeing. Tommy pushed back into the water, huddling close to the others.

"The moon has gone away." Purpled whispered, sounding so so mournful. He made a soft noise, something that could have been fear if it didn't sound so fucking wrong for Purpled to show fear. "I want it back."

More things had gone away than that, Tommy thought with a snort. He thought Brighton had been rainy as fuck. But that? That was just a light drizzle. Wind ripped across the beach, flinging so much it looked like a sandstorm mixed in was the hammering hail, so fast that every hit kicked up little spurts of sand and water. Distantly, as lightning crackled, he thought he could see figures on the beach.

But details were completely lost as the storm raged on. The only thing he knew was it didn't look like those fuckers weren't close to them which was good enough for him. Granted... he wasn't sure if they could leave themselves. He had gotten caught in hail once, a tiny little shower that was nothing compared to this and it had stung.

Not to mention the rain that poured down as well. He didn't think the drying trick could work with rain coming down that hard.

But all around them was... peaceful. A tiny little bubble that wasn't all sunshine and rainbows but it was like the hail and rain and wind and lightning just slid away before it hit their little pool. This was beyond magically becoming dry or freezing someone's feet to the ground. "Did we do this?" Tommy said.

"I think we did but I don't know how." Ranboo said, hunching so low in the water that he looked like he was about to disappear into it. "I think we all did it? Like together? I don't know how to explain it, man, it was just--"

"I fucking get it." Tommy said with a low whistle. He had felt it, the strange search when the four had met. It felt like rage on his tongue and he still felt fucking pissed right now. The hazy looks on Purpled and Tubbo had been bad enough but the pure terror on Ranboo's face as he stumbled into the water, desperate to escape.

Only one person was allowed to fuck with Ranboob and that was him! There wasn't any room for any more. And Tommy had wanted nothing more than for those fucking mer to fuck off and go back to pretending to be fish or whatever they did when they were in the ocean.

He scrubbed at his arms, furiously trying to wipe away the memory of that green fucker who carried him around like a sack of potatoes. He hated how the other had carried him and the way they had fucking spoke-

"I won't let them get you, there too dangerous to have you, you're lucky you got away and we can protect you now-"

That green bastard. Lucky? Lucky to get kidnapped by yet another of those fucks? Tommy hadn't felt very lucky at all. But what was worse was how when they got away, they kept asking him questions. His favorite music, food, what made him happy.

(He played Able Sisters for him when Tommy finally spat an answer to get him to go away and Tommy hated how it made him calm a bit).

"We could go to the pool now?" Tubbo said, looking so damn hopeful. Tommy grimaced. He didn't want to go anywhere near that damn pool, not after what happened to those two. But when he had tried to say that, Tubbo had started to push him to look at the moon and Tommy would really not have that breakdown happen again.

"Sure. fine." He said, starting to push himself up. The rocky edges of the tide pool stung the palms of his hands but he pushed past it with a grimace. "We have to get out of this fucking pool though."

"Can't we just stay here?" Ranboo said, a bit of a whine to his voice.

"They're going to get through the storm eventually. And if they do, we'll be sitting ducks here. Dunno what kind of magic bullshit they have but the green fucker who had me could explode. And Wilbur has his freaky voice powers." Tommy said. "The slime guy nailed him pretty good with a slime ball though, that was funny."

"Bad, the tall guy who grabbed me, teleported through shadows. Or the void. I couldn't tell, I was too busy panicking." Ranboo admitted. Tommy swore. "I think teleporting the three of us knocked him out for a bit though."

"Not fucking good enough." Tommy said, and he hissed as his move to yank himself out slashed his palm. Ranboo snagged his hand, pulling him off balance.

"You need to be careful. Don't even start with saying it's not as bad as it looks." Ranboo cautioned, looking over his hand. Tommy rolled his eyes. It wasn't that bad, just a shallow gash across his palm, sluggishly bleeding. Tubbo made a sad croon.

"Then I won't." He snarked back, pulling his hand away and reaching. If he could get out of the water, he could see if his drying powers worked against the rain and that would be game changing right there.

His hand was plucked up right as he put it down. A hiss choked in Tommy's throat. "He's right, mate, I wouldn't want you to hurt yourself."

Despite the massive storm, Philza didn't even look phased. He wasn't even damp, sitting down pretty as you please by the tide pool and sweeping back his overdramatic robes. He examined Tommy's hand with a soft sigh. "You need to be more careful."

"Let go!" Tommy snarled, trying to pull back but the fucker's grip was like iron. Not painful, not how some of his past fosters would grab him

Tommy jerked back as Ranboo swept a wave out of the pool, the other looking more determined than he had seen them before. Almost angry. A big wave too, and Tommy let out a victorious cry, sweeping his tail to splash water as well. He'd like to see the mer as a fish out of water!

Philza's eyes widened as the water hit him, breaking off of his examination with a surprised laugh.

Because nothing happened. No ripple like heat haze as scales swept over his skin, no flash of light, or twisting of bones. All that happened was that his robes were just a bit more damp than before, turning the green even darker. Tommy glared at him, frustrated.

"Why didn't that work?" He snapped. That was a big splash! It should have been plenty big enough to trigger a transformation. It wasn't any smaller than the puddles at least! And he hated how Philza's eyes crinkled with amusement because why wasn't the other mad?

"Because he's the fisherman." Ranboo said, pressing backwards into Purpled who let out a humming sigh that almost sounded annoyed. "The one from the story with the moon and the pool and the mer from the abyss. That's why it didn't work on him."

"So, you picked that up." Philza said and Tommy pushed himself in front of Ranboo, glaring. He tried to sweep Tubbo back too but the other was like an eel, wriggling and squirming out of his grip so they could flop against the bottom of the tide pool and pout. "Who told you that story?"

"A friend." Tommy spat. Fundy didn't deserve to have to deal with this bitch, he wasn't a snitch.

"Fundy!" Purpled trilled. Ranboo let out a ragged sigh, hand clamping over Purpled's mouth just a few moments too late. Philza tilted his head, a motion oddly birdlike and strangely made Tommy remember the seagulls that roosted near their house. Not quite right.

"The name sounds familiar but admittedly, I can't place it. I thought its telling had died out long ago." Philza said for a moment. "I've got to admit, I'm a little disappointed. I thought I would be the one to tell you that story. But, yes, pup, I am the fisherman from the story. It gives me a few advantages, the water affects me only as much as I want it too."

"More than that." Ranboo whispered into his ear and Tommy had to fight the flinch. "Even Schlatt looked nervous when he spoke and challenged him."

Tommy stared into Philza's placid eyes and thought of how he wasn't quite sure that the other hadn't heard Ranboo. But if he did, he gave no indication of it.

"I'm not afraid of someone who wears a bucket hat." Tommy finally said, and it was an ugly one too. Absolutely hideous. He bet it made kids cry and hot girlfriends weep. Just disgusting.

Philza spluttered. "I-what's wrong with my hat? It's a nice hat, mate!" He said, hand coming up to touch the brim. "There's nothing wrong with it!"

Tommy sneered. He could almost hear how Ranboo winced because that was an ugly hat. "Tragic. It eats brains. Because there's no way that someone could look at that hat and decides it looks good. No way, no how."

"I like it. Funny hat." Purpled said. Philza gestured at him and Tommy leveled him with a disappointed look. A good one too, just like how Purpled would look when Tommy had said something stupid with a hint of Tubbo's need for fire.

"Are you listening to the guy on drugs. Drugged by one of you." He snapped, familiar anger flaring hot. At how Tubbo was so still and calm still, about how it was just him and Ranboo protecting themselves.

"He's not on drugs mate, he's moon struck. When the full moon rises, she calls to all of her children, but the pups more than others." Philza said, leaning forward and Tommy feigned a swipe, ignoring Ranboo's yelp. Philza caught his hand, holding it firm. "Enough of that, mate."

"You hurt them!" Tommy snarled. He hadn't seen it but he could put the pieces together. Purpled's state was no accident and he had no doubt the mer would do the same to him and Ranboo. Which means he could not let that happen.

"They're not hurt at all. I mean, admittedly, it hit them harder than I've seen before. Either because of their connection to the pool or perhaps because of how your poor instincts have been stifled by the land." Philza turned Tommy's hand over easily, ignoring the other trying to yank it back. "Fuck, mate, you're so skinny."

"I'm not!"

"You are. Do you even know what you're supposed to eat now?" Philza asked, his blue eyes boring into Tommy's own.

"Fundy said our diets weren't that different, we just had to avoid more processed foods now and focus more on fish." Ranboo interjected softly. He shrugged when Tommy glanced back at him. "We talked while setting up. But we know what we're doing man."

"Adult mer can eat like a human. Pups can't." Philza said. He released Tommy's hand, Tommy pulling away instantly. "You're still developing and delicate. I've bet you've noticed already, how much of a struggle it is. You can't keep going like this, mate."

“You’re lying.” Tommy rejected. Well, fuck, yeah they had lost a few things. His beloved coke was a stormy relationship now, the caffeine jitters making him nauseous and sick but it was well worth the price. But it wasn’t that bad.

“Are you willing to gamble with the health of your hatchmates.” Philza shot back and Tommy stiffened. He would never do anything to hurt the others! “Pups aren’t left out of pods for a reason. They don’t survive long. We want to help you.”

“You want to kidnap us.” Tommy said and around him, the storm howled its fury. “And take us away from each other.”

He’d seen this before. Fosters who claimed that they wanted him and Tubbo only for, not even days later, to change their mind on one of them. He wasn’t going to be fooled again by this asshole and he wasn’t letting them take one of them.

“That is just about the opposite of what I want. In fact, I would prefer to keep all of you together. But I can’t promise anything if you’re taken by the other pods.”

Tommy hissed as he saw a shape pushed through the storm next to Philza. He recognized that long pink hair. At least Technoblade was wet, a waterproof jacket held over his head to shield from the worst of it. “Bruh.” He mumbled. “I had to push Wilbur back into the ocean. I can still hear him complaining.”

Fuck, he had hoped Techno would transform too. He was a massive bitch and Tommy was certain he could take him in a fight but- still. He was more worried for Ranboo, who looked like he was trying to become a statue.

Philza smiles, something helplessly fond that makes Tommy’s chest tighten. “This was a surprising development.” He said. “I never expected them to create storms together but I did warn him to always prepare for rain. His mistake.”

“Why is it always the chaotic ones. I just want one podmate who doesn’t cause drama.” Technoblade complained. Tommy hissed again, puffing up. Pay attention to him! He would fuck them up! “I think one of them is rabid.”

“Aw, no, he’s just showing off. Yes, you did a good job with this storm! Four magics, one storm, quite the impressive gift but I’ve heard hatchmates and magic can blend in odd ways.” Philza said. “I look forward to finding out what else you can do. You’ll be right terrors.”

“Choke and die.” Tommy snarled. “I’m not a fucking baby and we’re not going anywhere with you.”

“Bruh, what are you going to do?” He hated how Technoblade’s look always made him feel unfairly small, like the other had measured and dismissed anything he could do. “Guessing you can’t control the storm and full moon or not, I doubt you can call it again. Take the L.”

“Can too!”

“Take. The. L.”

“You can’t get us with the full moon so, uh, we can still fight you. It’s two against four.” Ranboo pushed back. It was ruined by how Ranboo immediately got gently head butted by an annoyed Tubbo, the other hearing the full moon being mentioned. “Ow!”

Techno snorted. Ignoring Tommy’s howl of rage, he reached out, grabbing Ranboo’s arm with one hand and Purpled’s in the other. In one easy move, he lifted them both partially out of the pool. “Really?”

Purpled blinked in befuddlement, staring down at the water. “Put me back!” He snapped, beginning to struggle. Ranboo was hyperventilating so fast he was starting to vibrate.

“Let go of them you fucker!” Tommy snarled, surging up and out of the water. His hand screamed in pain as he used it to push up but it let him take a swing at Techno’s knee, shredding the fabric as Techno stepped back.

“Put them back, you’re scaring them.” Philza scolded, hand fluttering. Techno did continue pulling but he did look at Philza.

“Old man, you know that this isn’t a nest, right?” He pointed out. Tommy looked up at Ranboo, the other looking afraid. But unconcerned. Slowly, the other tipped their head towards Techno. No, not towards him. Past him. Into the rain.

He squints into the darkness but couldn’t make anything out. What was Ranboo trying to show him?

“Well.” Philza said, looking almost embarrassed as he glanced down into the pool. “They looked so comfortable and so sad, I mean it really is quite similar if you think about it.”

“Bruh. It’s not even that defensible and even if Schlatt hasn’t dragged himself into the water yet, he and the other pods are still around.” Philza makes a sharp whistle and Techno rumbles, a deep sound that has Tommy reflexively flinching into the water.

He couldn’t say why other than the sound filled him with a strange worry of some kind. A need to be secured and protected because of some reason he didn’t know and Tommy hated it, hated that he could guess at the actual reason because part of him wanted to hide behind Techno, not under the water.

“We won’t tell anyone.” Ranboo whispered, barely audible above the wind. “We’ll break the magic and we won’t tell anyone about the mer in the ocean. You’ll never have to see us again.”

“Oh, pup.” Philza cooed, reaching for Ranboo. Tommy made a sharp hiss, snapping his teeth. Fucking hell, the tide pool was way too inconvenient. They picked it on purpose, the walls higher than water level, and sharp. Too difficult to climb out of but goddamnit, Tommy would bite Philza! “You’ll get your turn later, I need to check on your brother.”

It is with far too much ease that Technoblade hands over Ranboo. Gentle hands pull Tommy back before he could lunge. It’s Tubbo’s eyes that meet him, confused and worried. “Why are you scared?” He asked.

“You’ll understand later.” Tommy says to him. Because he has to believe that Tubbo will be normal later or he is going to destroy everything.

“I don’t want any of you to turn back.” Philza said, cutting through his thoughts. “You may not know it but you four are a miracle. A gift. We had long thought the pool stagnant but now, it’s delivered to us four little pups. By our laws, you are ours to care for until you come of age. I don’t plan on letting any of you go.”

“How long until we come of age?” Ranboo said, squeaking slightly. “I’m almost eighteen.”

“Centuries!” Tubbo sing songed. He propped his chin on Tommy’s shoulder. “Schlatt said centuries.”

Something in Tommy’s chest stuttered at that. He had heard before, what Schlatt had said but somehow, it felt more real with how Philza thoughtfully nodded. Like he and his friends really would love that long.

What would that be like?

With these bitches, hell. He was certain of it. “Put him down.” Tommy said, surging forward. Philza looked at him, all firm coolness. “Put them both down or I’ll hit you with lightning. I can do it. And it’ll hurt.”

And then Technoblade made a sound, sharp and reprimanding and it took everything Tommy had to stand firm and keep glaring. “You’ll learn.” Philza said, his eyes dark. “When it’s smarter to understand what your position is now.”

“I’d like to go back into the water too. This, uh, it’s not very comfortable?” Ranboo said. Purpled nodded frantically, looking annoyed. “Please?”

“Better.” Philza said. Every move screaming reluctance, far too slow. But slowly he lowered Ranboo into the water. Ranboo flopped in with a shaky sigh, eyeing Tommy who flipped him off.

What the fuck was that? Why did Ranboo want to go back into the water fully? He had seen the unmistakable signs of relief when Techno had pulled him out, fear of water in full swing and yet here was Ranboo, pushing to go back in. He didn’t fight as Ranboo leaned into him, hand reaching out to snag and pull Purpled over as soon as he was lowered in.

“We’ll have to leave soon, otherwise we won’t make it to the moon pool in time.” Technoblade said, staring into the storm where the ocean was. Tommy was pretty sure that was where the ocean was. Like 95%.

“Moon pool!” Purpled cheered. Tommy shook his head.

“We’re not going there.” He insisted. If he let them take them into the ocean, as far out as Mako, it would be so much fucking harder to escape. It’s not like they had a boat anymore.

Philza made a quizzical noise but Techno beat him to it. “You have to if you want your friends to be normal again.” He said. “Moonstruck pups need the moon pool to recover.”

“You didn’t say that!” Ranboo interjected. He pulled Purpled closer, looking terrified. “You didn’t say anything about that!”

Philza’s face dimmed for a moment before lighting back up. “You didn’t let me finish.” He said, sickeningly sweet. “But we do need to take your friends to the moon pool. What’ll it be, the pool or your friends stuck like this until the next full moon.”

Tommy howls, fury and rage and grief, lunging forward. A thin arm wraps around his chest, pulling him back faster. “Down!” Ranboo snarls, yanking him into the tide pool. It’s a strange feeling to breath water instead of air and Tommy struggles, glaring up at Philza’s distorted face.

And then he’s gone.

There’s a roar like thunder, only louder as a huge shape barrels into where Philza was before. Tommy surfaces with a gasp, and was profoundly disappointed to find Philza had leaped out of the way before he could be run over by a car. Why couldn’t life let him have nice things?

“How dare you!” Techno roared, spinning far too gracefully out of the way as the car jerked forward. The car door closest to the pool swung open and Fundy spilled out, his red curls matted by the rain.

“What the fuck.” He whispered, staring at them. Fundy’s laugh sounded a bit hysterical as he stumbled forward.

“I bet you’re wondering why I’ve brought you all here.” Ranboo said and Tommy turned to stare at him. “That’s a lie, I don’t know what’s going on.”

“Right no, we need to go.” The car jerked forward behind Fundy, barreling pushing Techno away. But the hits left dents in the metal. Tommy reached up, taking Fundy’s hands first. “Like, now.”

Fundy staggers as he picks Tommy up and Tommy glared at him. “If you drop me, I’ll kill you.” He warned. He was not getting covered in sand by this fucker.”

“Can you please chill for like one moment?” Fundy said, unceremoniously stuffing him into the car. Tubbo screams as Ranboo pushes him out of the water, trying to claw back into the pool. Tommy sinks his teeth into the leath of the seat and tries not to scream back.

“What took you so long?” Ranboo said, pointedly.

“My mom showed up and we decided to get the car. The beach is a damn war zone, the only reason we got through was that Schlatt got occupied by the pirate.”

“No! No! Danger!” Tubbo howls, flipping on Tommy. Tommy wraps his arms around him, ignoring how he jerks and thrashes. He wasn’t letting him go back. Not for anything. Purpled joins them moments later, simmering fury but it’s not till Ranboo slides in that something in his chest eases.

“Right.” Fundy said, staggering as the car jerks again. He reaches to climb in himself, slowed by the pile of mer.

“Not so fast.”

Philza wraps his arm around Fundy’s neck, as friendly as one might do to an acquaintance. But his smile was vicious. “You shouldn’t have touched my pups, mate.” He said, surveying the inside of the car with barely concealed rage. “I might have let you live before.”

“Don’t touch him!” Tommy said, and the temperature rose for a moment before plummeting just as fast. Ranboo made a concerned noise as Tommy slumped to the seat which was unwarranted, he was definitely fine and not excited.

“You’ve got nothing left after that storm. You can’t do anything.” Philza said, his arm tightening. Techno appeared over his shoulder, a wrathful pink ghost.

“But I can.” Silver flashes in front of his eyes and Tommy jerks back as Philza screams, a dagger stabbing into his shoulder. Tommy presses himself into the seat, nerves lighting up with fear. Only strangely soothed by how the scream was not of pain, but surprise and fuck, that was messed up. Fucking fish brain. “And I’ve wanted to do that for a long time.”

Fundy takes advantage of the distraction, ducking under the arm and flicking himself into the car. Tubbo helps as he is crushed but Fundy pays no mind, scrabbling for the car door.

Philza staggers back into Technoblade’s arms but for once, his eyes are not on the pups, but the driver seat. It’s Technoblade who speaks.

“I should have killed you.”

And the car door slams, the car roaring up the beach. It takes only a minute for Tommy to find his voice.

“WHAT THE FUCK WAS THAT.”

Chapter End Notes

Fundy and co to the rescue!

Are Technoblade and Philza telling the truth? You decide.

Hurricane Angela

Chapter Notes

Had the wrong chapter title, fixed now.

Trigger warning: Romantic relationship going very wrong

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“That.” Tommy said, propping himself up to stare out the window with heavy suspicion. Part of him still couldn’t quite believe that they had made it out there. But they had, hadn’t they? They were here, in the car. That meant that they were out. “Was hell in a handbasket.”

He could almost hear Fundy’s wince. “Yeah, that could have gone way better.” He said. “I wasn’t expecting them to arrive so soon, let alone the full moon thing.”

Oh yeah, the fucking moon drugs or whatever. Tommy still couldn’t wrap his head around it. Tubbo and Purpled had been so normal and now they were just completely out of it. Not even a single sign of worry or fear as the mer herded them around. Philza had made it sound so normal, insisting that they-

At the memory, Tommy cursed. “Shitfuck, turn around.” He said. The car swerved as he started fumbling for the door handle. “We need to go back like right the fuck now. Do not stop, do not pass go, or whatever. We need to go back.”

Ranboo catches on first, accidentally headbutting Tubbo in his attempt to facepalm, dumbass only remembering at the last moment that his arms were awkwardly angled under Tubbo. “Oh, that.” He said. He tries to hush an unsteady whine from Tubbo. “Where are we even going to get a boat this late at night? I have no idea where Purpled keep his keys to Dogchamp.”

“Wait, what-”

“I can hotwire a boat.” Tommy said with full confidence. He was at least 95% convinced he could hotwire a boat. How hard could it be? The movies said they were just like cars and they also said that hotwiring cars were easy. But Ranboo winced.

“No, seriously-”

“Purpled would be furious if we broke Dogchamp trying to hotwire it. Or even touched Dogchamp in general.” Ranboo said. Tubbo was starting to shift again, trying to eel his way towards the car door. “I, uh, maybe we could steal another boat? I don’t think we can swim there, not if they’re in the ocean.”

“I totally could.” Tommy said mulishly. Ranboo looked at Tubbo and Purpled’s and reluctantly, he had to concede. It was hard enough wrestling Tubbo when the other was on dry land. In the ocean? That fucker was slippery. And Tommy had no intentions of losing him. “So, if we use the hurricane as a distraction-“

“Wait!” Fundy said, practically yelling to be heard over the wind rattling the car and Tommy. “What are you guys talking about? What’s going on?”

Tommy gave him a look, halfway into a glare. “Philza.” He spat the word, hating them for what they meant. How easily he had trapped him there and insisted they couldn’t take care of themselves. “Said that if we don’t return to the Mako Moon Pool that Tubbo and Purpled will be like this until the next full moon.”

“Mako pool? We’re going to the Moon Pool again?” Purpled said, starting to shift and setting off Tubbo’s escape attempt again. Fucking damnit.

“Philza is a liar.” Came from the driver seat and Tommy remembered that Fundy had mentioned his mother being here. “And he would have said whatever it took to make sure you end up in his hands.”

“But what if he’s not lying?” Ranboo pointed out, using his tail to cover the door opener. “What if he’s telling the truth? There’s going to be so much trouble if Tubbo and Purpled are like this tomorrow. I don’t know what we’ll tell the school and we can’t stay out for a month to keep them from running off into the ocean.”

“What he wants is for you to be in the ocean, and unable to run. None of you have a chance of out swimming a full grown mer and if you take a boat out in this hurricane, you’ll capsize anyways if the mer don’t get to you first. I’m almost certain that one has a tracking ability.” The female voice said. Tommy craned his head, trying to see her better. She had hair like Fundy’s but hers was more wavy and her skin paper. “I’ve never heard anything about this lasting an entire month. There’s no way Philza would have such an obvious weakness.”

“I don’t fucking like it.” Tommy pointed out. Even ignoring his own tugging in his chest, part of him still didn’t want to risk it. It was hard enough watching Tubbo like this. “How am I supposed to trust you? Stranger danger. You could be another wrongun mer.”

“That’s Mrs. Sally.” Ranboo interjected, averting his eyes. “I know her. I, uh, don’t think she’s a mer? But I also didn’t know about this and the, you know-“

“We’re not mer.” Fundy shuts it down. He looked at the pouring rain outside. “But if you go out in this, even if you make it to the Moon Pool, it’s unlikely you’ll be able to make it back. They’ll be expecting you to go there.”

“So, what, we’re just supposed to wait and hope?” It doesn’t make it any better when Fundy nods and Tommy scowls, glaring at the storm like it’s personally offended him. “What stops them from picking us off at the next place?”

It seemed like they were sitting ducks everywhere on this island. They couldn’t exactly leave, not if they used the logic Sally was making. If they left to the mainland, they could get picked

off there. If they stayed, they were trapped on an island that was only so big.

It felt like a no win situation and Tommy gritted his teeth, fury rising in his chest.

“Most of them were distracted getting into the water.” Sally said, turning the corner. “And territory fights. The pirate’s pod was going up against Schlatt and I saw Awesam and Bad having a stand off against Quackity. No sign of Dream, but if he’s not there, he’s likely gone back to water. The deluge will keep them pinned for now. They want you, but not enough to risk being beached and discovered by people. You’ll be safe enough for now.”

“The storm really was lucky.” Fundy said, head thumping against the back of his seat. “I mean, we got in there, but I- let’s just say our chances were not very good at all to get you out. Zero. Zero is a good number.”

“It’s not that bad.” Sally said. The car rolled to a stop and she parked it. With a snort, Tommy realized they had parked in the front yard, practically inches from the porch. “I had a few ideas.”

“It was that bad.” Fundy mumbled as an aside. He sighed, hopping out of the car and open the door. Sally caught Tubbo before he could slither past her.

“No! No! Put me down!” Tubbo shrieked, tail flapping. Sally ignoring him, sprinting for the door. It didn’t ease the ache in Tommy’s chest as he watched her go, part of him furiously angry at her touching him. He wanted her to stop, wanted her to put Tubbo down even as part of him knew this was better. Fundy grabbed Purpled next, his steps much slower as he carried the other into the house.

Tommy glanced at Ranboo. “Do you think we can trust them?” He asked slowly. It felt a little late but the sight of them carrying Tubbo and Purpled’s, kicked and flailing, made part of him hesitant. Worried. They had so much power over them right now and it made him itch.

“I don’t think we have much of a choice, man. I sure don’t know how to turn this off and we can’t walk out into it.” Ranboo said, nodding at the rain pounding down and at his tail. “And I don’t want to be kidnapped.”

“But that’s not an answer. You’re the one who actually seems to know the fucker.” Tommy said. He hadn’t asked questions, sure that Ranboo knew what they were doing, but he couldn’t deny that Ranboo seemed strangely familiar with Fundy.

Ranboo’s fingers drummed against Tommy’s tail. It felt strangely pleasant. “Look, I- what happened was in the past. I don’t think it really applies to know but I can’t look at Fundy without remembering it and it makes me antsy. But that’s between me and him.”

“That’s not.” Tommy said slowly. He wished Tubbo was hear. Tubbo was good at catching sus, figuring out when other people were dodging questions and why. “What I asked.”

A long moment.

“Not really.”

Well that's just fucking peachy. Ranboob was the cardinal picture of someone so hyped up in anxiety they gave up on stuff like trust issues. He thinks. Tommy didn't care much about psychology. But having the other admit he didn't trust Fundy?

As the door banged open again, Tommy carved his promise into his heart. Useful source of information or not, if they even looked like they were going to betray them, he'd fuck em up.

Fundy darted in front of Sally, grabbing Tommy instead. "Tubbo and Purpled are not pleased. At all." Across his face, he can see the faint red of scratch marks. Tommy let out a small hiss as Fundy grabbed his arm, throwing it over his shoulder. It was more awkward than it was for Purpled, Tommy being far taller.

"Careful, asshole." he snapped as his tail was dragged up the porch steps. Fuck, this had been better when he had been dealing with those fucking mer. Behind him, he could hear Sally apologize as Ranboo also got dragged up the steps.

"I'm trying!" Fundy said. As soon as they got in the house, Tommy reached for the warmth, steam hissing as he slipped back into his human form and could stand on his own two feet. And then he nearly tumbled headfirst to the floor with a curse.

Normally, when he shifted back, it was weird but nice. A relief, part because he knew he was safe again and partially because that was always him. He had been human from the day he had been born, the mer situation was the alien part, it should feel wrong and bad and it had always been at least a little relieving for him to stand on his own two feet again.

And instead, he felt a sense of profound loss, like his own heart had been ripped out of his chest. Tommy wheezed slightly, shaking with the effort it took to sit up and back.

The fishbrain had been loud with it's want to change before but now it was practically screaming in his heart, drowning out every other thought. A bone deep need to shift back, that he wasn't supposed to have two legs but a tail, what was he thinking, shifting to this form with blunt claws and small teeth?

It felt almost painful. A dull spreading kind of pain that lingered and felt like he was slowly carving away at himself, agonizingly slow. If he thought the urge to look at the moon before was bad, but now it felt far far worse. He needed to feel it and even as he listened to the storm raging outside, something inside of him cried out in sadness.

Slowly, Tommy pushed himself up with a ragged breath, ignoring how his arms were shaking with the effort. "Tommy!" He heard Ranboo call behind him. Tommy waved a casual hand, trying to project a sense of casualness that he didn't have.

"I'm fine, fucking hell. That just hit me way harder than it usually did." He said. Fundy caught his arm, helping him up to standing before Tommy pushed his hand away. Fuck, that was worse than the time he broke his wrist and ended up in the hospital. He winced, testing himself as he stood before looking up. "Never doing that again."

Ranboo slowly shook his head, Sally lowering him down to the floor. "Only you." He said. He pushed himself up, looking around. "Where is Tubbo and Purpled? Didn't you carry them

inside first?”

“In the bathroom. They freaked out when we carried them in and we put them into the bathtub to calm the down. It helped, but only a bit.” Sally said, and she shrugs. This angle, and Tommy can see she has another silver knife hanging from her belt and he eyes it cautiously. It’s sick but it’s oddly out of place. “The tightness helps but I can’t remake a pup pool or nest.”

Bedraggled and wet, Sally looks... normal. From how Fundy had talked about her, she had seemed almost superhuman. The person who had gathered all the knowledge about the mer and wounded Philza, and yet standing there, she seemed like a suburban mom, back from work. One who was carrying a knife.

“What’s a pup pool?” Ranboo quietly interjected. Tommy crouches next to him, about to activate the insta drying feature but Ranboo holds up his hand. Tommy raised an eyebrow. What was that about? “Not right now.”

Sally’s face tightened and she glances away. “Pup pools are safe spots for young mer.” She said. “Back when humans didn’t live here, mer would leave pups in tide pools to keep them away from the dangers of the wider ocean when they were moving territory or hunting.”

“Like that fucking tidepool on the beach.” Tommy said. He remembered how fucking weird Sam had been about the tide pool. He had thought it weird how he had beelined to it, pushing him in. The perfect, natural made prison like a fucking- whats that greek box, Penelope’s pouch? Pandora’s vault? Something like that with a p and a container of some kind.

“It’s not really common now that humans are everywhere. Now it’s usually more like underwater sea caves, pools deep in swap, pools in caves.” Sally said, nodding along. Tommy can read between the lines and he scowls. The Moon Pool was what, a fucking nursery? “But ever since, it’s... calming? I think. For pups to be in those smaller, tide pool like places. It means safety. A bathtub isn’t the best substitute but it’ll work, for now.”

“How do you know so fucking much about this?” Tommy bursts out. He can see where Ranboo was going now and he lets the magic sweep through, sending Ranboo to the floor like he as. “Like fisherman myth, yeah, maybe. Moon, that’s a good guess. But how did you find out about the pup stuff?”

Philza had talked like pups were well kept secrets. Like no one should have known about them and here, Sally was talking like she knew all about them. How they were cared for and history and all this fucking stuff that Tommy didn’t even know! And he was supposed to believe that that was fucking normal?

Fuck, he should have known that this was suspicious at hell. Trusting Fundy, even after he had rescued him? Why had he thought that was a good idea? Outside, lightning splintered a tree as Tommy spread his stance, baring his teeth.

Sally put a hand. “It’s nothing bad.” She insisted. Sally glanced sidelong at Fundy. “I just know more about them then most and that means that I know how they work. I promise, you’re in no danger here.”

“A believable story.” Tommy snarled. He jerked as Ranboo wrapped a hand around his wrist and tugged. Ranboo was as unsteady as he was, breathing hard. Good to know this fuckery wasn’t limited just to him. This fuckery was spread wide! Gods, he fucking hated fish brain. Ranboo shook his head slowly, pulling himself up to his feet.

“I think.” Ranboo said slowly. Tommy slowly jerked his head into a nod. He’d let Ranboob “That we’re going to go check on Tubbo and Purpled. And we’re going to talk about what we want to do and then you’re going to tell use everything. Because, I, look you haven’t been bad but I can’t forget what you did.”

“I-“ And Ranboo shakes his head, pulling Tommy with him as he walks out of the living room. But they don’t make it to the bathroom before Ranboo is letting out a shuddering breath, sliding down the wall. Tommy catches him as he stumbles.

“What was that about, bitch?” He asked. Ranboo huddled in his arms and it was freaky how someone so tall could just fold up so small, so easily. Ranboo let out a wheezy breath, shaking his head. “I could, I dunno fucking sick Tubbo on you or something. Or you can talk to me with my master counselor skills of being a counselor.”

“It’s stupid.” Ranboo said hoarsely. “And barely relevant and it shouldn’t still affect me but somehow it does and I can’t make it stop.”

“Then fucking talk to me! I can’t do anything if I don’t know what’s going on!” Tommy said, trying to hard to bite back the frustration. It’s hard because Tubbo would have talked to him by now but this wasn’t Tubbo, this was Ranboob. But it’s so hard to think past the fish brain sometimes, which insists they’ve known each other forever and ever.

“I knew him.”

“Philza?” Tommy asks, frowning. Ranboo had never spoken anything about Philza and that ugly bucket hat was definitely memorable. Too memorable. He needed brain bleach because god, that was horrifying.

“I dunno, man, I thought it was okay.” Tommy stared at him, realizing he had said that out loud. And Ranboo disagreed. Oh fuck.

“That thing.” He informed Ranboo crisply. “Was a fucking nightmare hat that crawled out of the sewers. It’s ugly. Do not try to insist that it’s not. It’s absolutely hideous and Philza must be blind if he wears it.”

Ranboo let out a wheezy giggle and they both tried to ignore how his eyes were wet. “I- I guess back to what I’m saying, but yeah, no. Never met Philza before. I’ve never even heard of the guy which is weird because I’ve lived here my entire life so surely he should have come up at one point.” Ranboo paused. “But no, I meant Fundy.”

“I fucking guessed that, Boob boy.” It wasn’t exactly hard considering they lived on a fucking island and recognized each other. If Ranboo hadn’t met Fundy, that would have been some weird coincidences.

“No, like, he was my friend. A couple years ago, we met when the school paired us for science and just kind of bonded. Purpled didn’t really talk to me at the time and most people kind of ignored me and Fundy, he was nice? You know? We agreed on a lot of things and he liked computers and Minecraft like I did.” Ranboo said. But Tommy, with his amazing powers of deduction, could guess that this went fucking sour. Ranboo talked about Fundy like he talked about some of his past foster siblings, the ones who had knifed him and Tubbo in the back.

“Then?”

“We had some kind of beach vacation field trip or whatever. And Fundy, he didn’t like the ocean either so we just stayed out of it. But then Clay came after us and started teasing us for staying out of the water.” Ranboo let out another ragged breath and Tommy awkwardly patted his shoulder. That worked, right? “And Fundy completely threw me under the bus. Said that I was the one with the fear of water and he only stayed out for me. And then he just stood there and watched as they picked me up and threw me in.”

Tommy should have expected the rage. “That fucking asshole!” He seethed, shooting to his feet. “I’m going to fucking kill him!”

How dare he! Only Tommy was the one allowed to mess with the boob boy! And here was Fundy, knifing Ranboo in the back! Well, he would get what was coming to him! As the biggest man ever, Tommy knew how to crush his foes!

He stumbled as Ranboo wrapped an arm around his leg. “Don’t.” Ranboo said, shaking his head frantically. “He doesn’t- okay, maybe he does but it doesn’t matter right now. And we need a safe space to hide.”

“It’ll be safe when I kick his ass. He fucking deserves it.” Tommy stared at Ranboo. “You didn’t deserve that. He fucking threw you to that asshole Clay. He deserves revenge.”

“I do.”

Tommy jerked, nearly tripping as he spun around. Fundy was staring at them through the doorway, shoulders slumped. “I- there was a lot more to that.” He said. “And I couldn’t tell you then and it fixes nothing now but you deserve to know.”

“You deserve death.” Tommy hissed and Ranboo sighs, head thumping against his knee. It’s a suspiciously wheezy sigh, and Tommy couldn’t help dropping his hand so it was resting in Ranboo’s head. He could beat the shit out of Fundy with one hand anyways, it was sporting to give him a handicap.

“Fundy-“ Sally tried to interject.

“You tell them or I do.” Fundy said, shaking his head quickly. “They might as well know now, it’s not like it’s going to be a secret for long. Techno already knows.”

“Knows what?” Ranboo whispered. “What were you hiding? Why did Techno want you dead?”

Fuck, he'd forgotten about that. Techno had been furious when he had seen Sally. And, for what? Fucking hell. Tommy needed a Coca Cola.

"Because." Fundy said, yanking away from Sally. His face twists. "Wilbur wasn't just her boyfriend. He was my dad."

And Tommy's heart stopped.

He could see it. Now that he knew, after spending so long with Wilbur, he could see it. They had the same messy curl style. Golden brown eyes, their lankiness, the way their hands danced when they got excited.

It made him sick. Tommy tensed, ready to bolt for the door.

"Let me explain." Sally said, closing her eyes slowly. "Before you run. I can skip over the parts that are not really suitable but, it's a long story."

"Him?" Tommy said, tugging at his hair. "Him? What the fuck! He's- he's a hipster! A fucking hipster! That who he is, a fancy hipster wrongun."

"That eats people." Ranboo interjected.

"That too!"

Sally winced. "I didn't know what when we first met." She said. "I came from a fishing family but we met on the docks. He was busking, from boredom he later told me. He loved instruments, but most don't work as well underwater and either way, he wanted people to hear him. It was a typical summer romance at first. I thought he was cute so every day, I'd go and flirt after finishing the boat shift.

But eventually, it became something more. Eventually we were moving into our own house, setting up our own life together, expecting a child. The night we found out, Wilbur took me to the ocean and explained everything. Almost. That he was a mer, that his family were mer. He showed me his tail and I ended up staying with my parents that night. But I came back because at the time, I truly thought we could work it out. And sure, it was a lie but it's not like it really changed him and I could see why he might have kept it secret.

And it helped that he was just so excited for Fundy to be born. He was more invested than I was, while I was waddling around reading parenting books, he'd furiously break down and rebuild the nursery. He was so excited about him. That's where I learned the pup information, he used to ramble constantly about it. That's when I should have become afraid. He was stuck on the idea of Fundy being a mer. I joked about it a few times, him taking after me instead, but he'd shut it down so fast and he got angry and eventually I dropped it, reasoning he was just anxious. Now, I look back and I'm horrified at what I let slip. Techno and Philza were around all the time, talking about Fundy and I felt suffocated but really, I was certain it would get better.

But it didn't, not when Fundy was born perfectly healthy but perfectly human. No tail, no scales. Nothing. Wilbur disappeared for a week with no word and then came back, acting like

nothing had ever happened. He told me that he was surprised but he was willing to accept this, he just needed time with his family to get his head in order again and get ready for a responsibility he hadn't thought about. Strike two. I forgave him.

Up until a few months later when I woke up to my baby missing from his cradle. I guessed where they had gone. Some part of me knew that he wasn't right. And it was proven right when I ran into that cave and saw Wilbur holding my sleeping baby above that pool. He didn't care that the pool could kill Fundy, insisting that as his son, it would be safe. That I would hurt him. I asked him why he would accept me being human but not our son and he just... blinked. And said that didn't really matter but his pup would be mer.

I threw whatever I could at his face, grabbing my baby before he could fall and fleeing from the sound of screeches. Popped my eardrums with some makeshift ear plugs but they got me back to my boat. Where Techno nearly tore me apart when I told him that I had left Fundy in the forest where they couldn't find him. He was fine, I hid him in the smuggler's compartment of my boat but it got the asshole to drop me and head back to the forest to help his twisted father and brother find Fundy. I piloted the boat back with two popped ear drums, and nearly bleeding out. Checked in on the mainland hospital, changed my name, and got a new job. Told everyone I was a single mother and spent all my free time getting whatever information I could in case he ever came back and tried to take my son again."

Tommy stared at Sally. It was an impossible story, but he could recognize the worn love on her face as she stared at Fundy.

"I shouldn't have thrown you under the bus." Fundy said, shaking his head. "But I can't go in their ocean. If Wilbur had seen me, he could have snatched me away. We don't know if he'd recognize me still but we couldn't risk there being some kind of magical connection."

"Why not stay in the mainland?" Ranboo whispered.

"Because they were looking for that. The day after I woke up, I had to escape the hospital. Schlatt set his goons out, looking for Fundy." Sally said, rubbing at her stomach. "I figured, what's the one place they wouldn't look because it's so stupid, no one would think of doing it? And it worked."

"That's fucked up." Tommy said, his shoulders slumping slightly. "Really fucked up."

But he couldn't find it in himself to be surprised. Wilbur had changed a lot in his mind from that fun older brother figure he saw at the market.

"Go to sleep." Sally said, shaking her head and she guided Fundy out. "I just dropped a lot on you and it's late. Sleep, and if you want to leave when the storm is over, you can."

Tommy didn't think he'd be getting much sleep.

And now we find out what happened with Sally and Fundy! I'm looking forward to exploring their story more, they're fun characters and Fundy is one of my favorites

Also, Tommy and Ranboo are having A Night

Hook, Line, and Sinker

Chapter Notes

I'm baaaack

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Tubbo had pulled all nighters before. The real ones, not the kind of fuzzy giddy feeling ones that came from too much sugar and video games and a bit of the delightfully mischievous feeling from breaking a rule. The real kind, where the next day felt difficult just to exist in and it passed in a messy slop, everything jumbling on top of each other. With prickly eyes and aches and pains that felt just a bit too real at the moment.

He'd been spoiled, he thought muzzily. Clementine had been good about not being weird at night. Some of their past families had been a nightmare who considered sleep a barrier to chores they definitely should take care of. But at Clem's, as long as they didn't wake them up after they tucked in at eight, the foster didn't much care what they did. And he had gotten used again to the good kind of all nighters.

He'd need to fix that. Just after the world got a little bit easier and the drone on the edge of his ears didn't threaten to put him to sleep. Tommy had long since given up, face down on the desk. Tubbo eyed him out of the corner of his eyes. He looked strangely peaceful, a change from how tense and stressed he looked when they had woken.

Purpled and Ranboo weren't much better. Ranboo looked exhausted, dark bags visible under his sunglasses even as he stared down at the textbook like it would show him the meaning of life if he stared hard enough. He was sure if Purpled was asleep or not. Purpled hadn't said a word since they had woken up, looking away with dull violet eyes. The other had put his head down on the desk and refused to look up again once they got to school.

Something had happened last night, Tubbo thought meditatively, staring down at his own textbook even as the words on the page blurred. Something huge that had made Tommy cagey and clingy, something that had Ranboo refusing to sleep, and Purpled refusing to look at them. Something that left his own memories of the night strangely fragmented. But he couldn't think of what and his own mind was a fuzzy blur.

Because of course, in all the drama of last night (he cringed at the thought of it), they forgot one very important detail.

It was a Sunday.

And apparently, this town considered tropical storms a minor inconvenience not worthy of canceling school over. Despite the tree branches and detritus littering the roads, school was still on.

He had gotten shaken awake, nursing the mother of all migraines, by a strangely relieved Sally who hustled them out of the awkward pallets and into the car. He wasn't sure when he had fallen asleep, couldn't even remember going into Fundy's room but he knew for a fact that he hadn't slept enough.

They couldn't even drink caffeine. Fundy had scooted away the coffee he was holding as soon as Tommy grabbed for it, letting Tubbo nab it from the other side. At the very first whiff, his stomach lurched so bad, he had to put his head between his knees for fifteen minutes.

Tommy took a sip like a dumbass and ended up hurling on the side of the road. Not exactly their finest moment.

So no delightful, beloved caffeine to get them through the day. But every moment of the school day felt like a chore, the exhaustion in his bones threatening to pull him down deep.

And look, Tubbo understood it, okay?

Their role was precarious. He already knew they had been kind of side eyed for him and Tommy's well, everything and the bullies going after them. He wouldn't be surprised if Clay had kept Mako Island a secret or changed the story to look better, but that didn't change the facts.

Right now, they couldn't risk appearing too off to outsiders. Any sort of bad or weird reputation risked people getting curious. And while Tubbo would totally love to expose those mer assholes, people getting curious might mean someone noticing their pesky little reaction to water.

"I'm the only one I know who knows about the Mer in these waters." Sally had said in the car, staring resolutely forward. "But that doesn't mean nobody else knows or won't put the pieces together. And I wouldn't wager on it."

And there was a whole story there judging by the way Tommy had scoffed but stories had to wait until after school. But even the thought of it made him scowl angrily at the desk.

Not Acceptable.

He wasn't going to let him or his friends get shipped off as sideshow freaks or to some sort of secret lab. Tubbo would blow this entire island up if they tried. But that meant having to hide away and pretend everything was normal.

Showing up to school clearly exhausted? That's just living the teenager life. But all four of them disappearing at the same time after a tropical storm rocked the tiny town? Cause for concern.

The only good thing was that at least Clay and his bullies hadn't shown up today. Their desks were empty, garnering suspicious murmurs but Tubbo was too tired to care. They were probably nursing a hangover or something stupid like that. And it kept anyone from really caring that they were about to pass out at their desks.

He thought it was stupid but it was probably better being at school today.

They had no clue when the mer would come after them again. Tommy had been vague, saying that the Mer had their asses kicked and wouldn't be coming back for a while. If they went into public, well, Wilbur had proved that that wasn't much of a barrier to him. But hopefully they would draw the line at massacring an entire school in broad daylight. ...at least Tubbo was hoping that they would. Surely, after hiding their secret for so long, they wouldn't go that far?

(Fuck he really wished he knew what happened last night and it ached that he didn't. How Ranboo and Tommy kept staring at him and Purpled like they were worried they would disappear if they looked away. What had happened?)

It gave them a logical excuse to be indoors and around other people. It was, well, sucky. But good enough for now. It gave him the shivers to think that last night, one or more of them could have been taken and he couldn't have done anything about it and what was the use of planning if he was just going to be useless so bad he couldn't even remember what happened and-

He forced the thought out of his head, letting himself finally face plant onto the desk. Ugh. It felt like gravity was getting stronger right now, weighing his shoulders down. They had much bigger problems right now.

After school.

Not to mention the whole issue of the hiding themselves. Tubbo was too tired to feel worried yet, but he noticed Clem hadn't texted or called yet. Sally had work. Fundy had school that ran longer than theirs. No one was around to keep an eye on them.

Could they ward off the mer if they came back as people and not obviously, well, apex predator? How high up was Schlatt? Tubbo really wished he could google the other in class but even the aging teacher noticed when people started using their phones. That was a step too far to escape even his eyes. But like, was he famous enough that he could-

Look, he liked Clem. He liked Clem a lot. They didn't scold Tommy or try to play them against each other or insult him when the words started swimming around the page. They didn't load him and Tommy down with chores until they were just a step above servants.

There wasn't really love there but there was a kernel of...

Content. He might not look at them as a parent but he could grow to be happy in that house. He'd see his friends everyday and Clem was a good foster parent.

But that just meant that he was more on edge with worry that they hadn't texted back yet. Surely, the mer hadn't gone after Clem? The other had seemed smart enough but it's not like killer mer were covered well in school. Tubbo would know. After sitting through two hours of this boring drone, he hadn't heard so much as a hint. But part of him remained worried anyways.

Because even beyond becoming content in their house with good food and someone who even if they weren't really parental, showed kindness in their own way-

Part of him was worried even more now what would happen to them if Clem disappeared. Clem was a last chance home, the only one who would take them and the only one on this island who could. What would happen to them if they were gone? Would they have to leave?

Could they leave?

Normally he'd have a plan but the exhaustion kept dragging his thoughts into mud before he could think of one. And all of them were exhausted so no help from the others and a pressing need to work out how to fix that. Sleeping in shifts maybe? But no matter how much his thoughts kept skipping away, they kept skipping back to something.

Mako Island.

For some reason, he wanted to go back there. Really wanted to. Not the curiosity of investigation or the daredevil confidence of the dare. But he really and truly wanted to go back and he wasn't really sure why. It was dangerous there, he knew that well. If they went back to the island, they were practically sitting ducks. The mer could flip the boat or pluck them away as they swam. There were far safer places to be.

But ever since he woke up, there was a thrumming need in the back of his head. A deep seated want to be back there for... something. He didn't know. There was no logical reasoning to it, no thoughts he could make out from the fish brain. He just desperately wanted to go back, danger and mer be damned. And the thought of it terrified him.

(Part of him didn't know if they could even leave now. What he'd do if they'd get the call that they were being brought back to England.)

It seemed like eternity before the droning cut off. Tubbo pressed his cheek into the desk with a low huff, ignoring how Ranboo shook his shoulder. "It's lunch time." The other said quietly. "We need to eat."

"Too tired. Not that hungry." That was a lie. He was absolutely starving, the only emotion that was strong enough to overpower his intense will to sleep. He felt like he hadn't in weeks, despite inhaling a can of tuna this morning.

But the thought of eating greasy cafeteria food made him feel even more nauseous. The pizza sounded less and less edible by the minute. Ugh. This was absolutely abysmal. But getting good food required things like getting up and walking to the dock and walking all the way back and talking to people and ugh. Maybe he could just last until after school? Ranboo apparently agreed because he sat down again.

"Man, this sucks." he said quietly. "I don't know how long we're going to last if they keep doing this to us. This is, I mean I don't really sleep because uh, insomnia? But usually I still get to have caffeine and sneak sugar and I can't even do that and wow, did not realize that not sleeping sucked this much."

Tubbo lifted his head up, reaching forward to cover Ranboo's hand with his own. "They're not going to catch us." He said firmly, voice low. They'd learn to sleep in shifts or he'd kill them all or something. "We can deal with this."

“Shuddap.” Tommy moaned into the desk. “I’m gonna fucking kill you. Noise. Sound. Light. I hate everything.”

“Mood.” Ranboo said, nodding. “Not on the light though, I’m wearing sunglasses and all that.”

“Die.”

“No.”

Tubbo propped his chin on his hands and got ready to watch the fight, but his phone suddenly buzzed, dragging his attention away. He frowned down at it when he pulled it out. This didn’t seem right. It was one of those meal apps, Clem had downloaded it onto their phones in case they were out too late unexpectedly and couldn’t leave cash. No money hadn’t been loaded on yet but it was a bit of reassurance, if Clem was out for too long, they’d load money on. But that didn’t explain the message.

Your delivery has arrived.

Tubbo showed it to the others with a frown. “Did any of you guys order anything from my phone?” He asked. He hadn’t seen anyone take it but it wasn’t out of the question. He had been half asleep through most of class.

“No.” Purpled said curtly without even looking up. Well, that wasn’t much of a surprise. Ranboo, however, frowned back, leaning closer to read it.

“That’s not the order message.” He said. He shrugged at Tommy and Tubbo’s skeptical looks. “I’ve snuck an order out when I got sick of my parent’s going on another health food diet craze. I know what it looks like when someone orders food and usually it mentions the driver you got assigned and where you ordered from. That looks more like the gift food order, it never says any information. Sally did it for me once, when I said I never tried pizza before.”

“You never tried pizza before.” Tommy gasped, hand flying up to dramatically cover his mouth. “Fucking hell, we should- get some. Fuck. Fucking this. Fuck that. Fuck this entire situation.”

“But don’t you normally need to have people who know your account id or whatever for that?” Tubbo said. He had only briefly looked into it, weighing if they ever needed to scam food out of people, but he was fairly certain that it was more complicated than that. “Besides, do we even have anyone who would make surprise orders for us? Sally or Fundy probably would have said something.”

“Could have been Clem?” Tommy said with a shrug as he stood up. “They haven’t texted yet, maybe this is their way of apologizing for being gone for so long? Either way, I’m going to go see what it is. Don’t got anything to fucking lose by doing so, hasta la vista or whatever.”

“You only live once?” Ranboo said hesitantly.

“Yeah, sure that too. Let’s fucking go!” Tubbo hesitated, glancing back at Purpled. The other was still facing down on the desk, not looking at anyone.

“You can go.” He said cautiously. Part of him was split, wanting to protect Tommy but none of them should be alone right now. Not with the Mer still running around and targeting them. “I’m going to stay back and hold down the fort here with Purpled. No sense in going if we all get, I dunno, snatched at once.”

“Can they do that?” Ranboo asked, looking nervous. Tommy rolled his eyes.

“Yeah, they fucking could. Do you want to stay here like a wuss instead?” Ranboo slowly nodded and Tubbo shrugged as they looked back at him. “Right, that settles it. Tubs and me will go and you guys will stay. We’ll be back in a bit, scream if someone tries to kidnap you or something.”

Tubbo rolled his eyes, letting Tommy pull him out of the chair and following him out of the room. “That was rude, you know.” He chided, folding his hands behind his head. “I don’t think Ranboo’s really used to this kind of thing. I don’t think any of us are really used to this. Before, if you told me about any of this, I would have thought you were insane.”

“Well, he’s gonna have to get used to it, doesn’t he? It’s not like there’s much we can do to change things right now.” Tommy said, shaking his head as he trotted down the hallway. “I know he doesn’t like it and I don’t like it either. But hiding is fixing nothing.”

Tubbo hesitated. “I don’t know if we can fight them right now.” He answered, keeping his voice low. he wanted too, fuck, he really wanted to. But none of his plans would come together, at least the ones that ended with all of them alive and safe. The Mer had magic, claws, and years on their side. They had... well, explosives and each other,

“I don’t think there’s another plan or way out of this. We can’t run from them forever.” Tommy answered, shaking his head. But Tubbo could see the waver in his confidence, the uncertainty in his eyes. Years of living together showing him that Tommy didn’t know either. “A big man like me could crush them easily.”

“I know.” Tubbo agreed. Not bringing up how that most likely wasn’t true at all. “But right now, we’re exhausted and hungry. We don’t have much of a chance and Ranboo’s scared of that.”

“You didn’t see what I saw last night.” Tommy said, slipping closer. Tubbo grabbed him by the hand properly, feeling a bit safer at the warm weight in his hands. “That storm? That was us. We fucking did that.”

“We... did?” Tubbo said, blinking slowly. Tommy nodded, his grin almost manic. Tubbo thought about the destruction he had seen and how others were whispering and complaining before classes. They had done that?

“Magic.” Tommy reminded him in a whisper. “I don’t know what happened but we did that through some sort of power of friendship bullshit or whatever. All I know is I wanted them away from us and so did the rest of you and suddenly, we just- did something. I don’t know

how to describe it but one moment there was clear skies and the next, tropical storm coming out to shiv some bitches.”

Tubbo nodded, slowly, thoughtfully as they neared the front entrance. It didn't seem quite right to him. There were so many holes in this that he wasn't quite sure how to address them. Could this explain why they were so exhausted when they awoke? But try as he might, he couldn't get a clear memory of it. He remembered walking into the backyard and- he thinks he saw someone and then something, his memories fragmenting. “What did I miss last night?” He mumbled, half to himself.

Tommy glanced at him and Tubbo stiffened. Because Tommy, brave and confident Tommy, looked afraid again. For Tubbo. “I'll tell you later.” Tommy promised. “Everything. Honest. But not fucking here.”

Tubbo nodded. “I'll hold you to that.” He warned as they stepped into what passed for a front lobby. Empty but he could hear voices outside. Not a time he could press for answers. A seagull squawked by the door, staring at him. Tubbo found himself looking away from them, strangely nervous to meet their eyes.

Were seagulls supposed to stare like that? Or look angry?

He beelined to the plastic bags sitting on the counter of the lobby. On the front, their names were written in stark black sharpie. All four of their names, the letters swimming but familiar enough that he could recognize them. Tubbo felt his stomach lurch slightly. Whoever did this knew them, not just him and Tommy.

“Holy shit, this is good stuff.” Tommy said, practically pushing his face into the bag. He pulled out a container, sniffing it before showing it to Tubbo. There was a hungry light in his eyes and Tubbo couldn't blame him.

Sashimi, fresh and expensive looking. Plump tuna and salmon, carefully sliced shrimp. Some sort of pale white fish. Slivers of what looked to be octopus. It was a huge container, stuffed practically to bursting. His stomach yawned open, and he could feel himself drool. Fuck, that looked amazing. Tommy set it aside, digging though. “There's four of those massive containers.” he said, sounding slightly awed. “And fucking, what the fuck is this?”

He pulled out a dish, only half the size, frowning at it. Tubbo took a peek. “Seaweed salad?” He said. he had only seen it once, browsing at a gas station that was desperately trying to be upscale while their social worker waited for them to finish their snack raid. Despite never having it, he felt himself desperately longing for it.

And terrified. “This seems... targeted.”

“I guess?” Tommy sent him a weird look. “I mean they ordered it for us so it would have to be targeted.”

“No like... This is expensive stuff. Really expensive stuff.” Tubbo lowered his voice. “Clem isn't rich, Ranboo said his parents don't order out food like this and Purpled never mentioned his doing anything like this and there's no way he eats at fancy places that do this. I think he's

allergic to the idea of fancy. And all of this looks tasty and edible with nothing that triggers our... sensitivities.”

No rice which they found had become barely tolerable. None of the other sides he was pretty sure came with gas station sushi like pickled ginger or the spicy green paste. All of it looked like something they could eat. He had never eaten seaweed salad before but the moment he glanced at it, he had never wanted anything more. Fish and seaweed. Ocean stuff. Which meant someone who knew them had ordered it. Really knew them.

It was practically tailor made to kids trying to hide that they were Mer.

Tommy started digging through the bag. “Has to have a fucking receipt, right?” He said, pulling containers out. Tubbo mentally cataloged each one. It was hard to keep himself from digging in, his palms beginning to hurt with how he was digging his fingernails into them. Fuck, he could smell the fish and he craved it so bad, the fish brain screaming to help himself and gorge on the food in front of him. “I fuck- Philza said he knew what we could eat but we didn’t-”

“Philza?”

“Long story, after school.” Tommy said, his eyes darting back to Tubbo. Tubbo pressed a hand against his back, wordless comfort, and felt Tommy slump a bit. “Short story now. He said we didn’t know what to eat yet but he did. That he could show us. I told him to fuck off.”

“Good.” Tubbo said. He had a good feeling what kind of strings likely came on that offer. They could figure it out themselves. Or well, he thought by surveying the boxes, they knew more of it now. Seaweed salad and fish. It seemed obvious? But there had to be more than that. Was their digestive system different now? What about the other nutrients and stuff, the stuff that didn’t come in seafood? Did they need supplements? Do Mer eat fish bones-

“Found it!” Tommy said triumphantly. He frowned down at the receipt, the paper nearly crumbling under his tight hold. “The fuck is this?”

Tubbo slid under his arms, he would never say this but being short was convenient sometimes, and looked at the receipt. Despite his worries, the name was unfamiliar.

Nikki and Puffy Nihachu

But under it was a little doodle of a fish with a massive grin and Tubbo had a good feeling this wasn’t some random act of altruism at all. Mer they hadn’t met maybe? Or maybe Mer that they had and he couldn’t remember. Tommy huffed, tossing the receipt back into the bag. “We can’t eat any of this.” Tubbo said with a sigh, looking longingly at the food. “They could have laced it with something.

“I think we should.” Tommy said. He shrugged at Tubbo’s skeptical look. “We’re hungry, aren’t we? And we got school for hours longer after this so they can’t exactly drag us out. And I doubt it’s any of the killer stuff.”

“The risk is too high.” Tubbo argued back. He bit his lip. Why were the mer ordering food for them anyways? Wouldn’t it benefit them more if they were starving? Tommy started stacking the containers into the bag and Tubbo used the distraction to pull out his phone to do something he probably should have before. No new messages had appeared but he searched his accounts history, finding the order buried under the gifts section. At least he could find where it came from.

Seeing the restaurant, he choked. Tommy’s head shot up, looking at him in worry. “I just-what the fuck?” Tubbo said, showing Tommy the screen. The food was expensive. Seriously expensive. Like holy fuck, that fish had to be magical expensive. Some sort of seafood bistro in town that prided itself on catching top grade fish that were wholly ocean harvested and better than blab blab blab. It even had a fancy organic bakery attached that had even more heartstopping prices. Either way, this was way out of their price range.

“Fucking rich people.” Tommy said with a scowl as he scooped up the bag. “Why the fuck would someone get something like this for us?”

Tubbo let out a thoughtful hum as he trailed behind him. This had added a new level of mystery. This had to be a mer thing. Why buy such expensive food otherwise? “We’ll need to investigate this place.” He said, copying down the restaurant name. “Maybe they saw these people and we can get a description to avoid them.”

“That would be great. I dunno who the fuck Nikki or Puffy is.” Tommy said, hefting the bag up high. “But they do have good taste in food.”

“Let’s get Purpled and Ranboo’s thoughts before we do anything.” Tubbo said. Putting his phone away. No messages had been attached, just the name and the restaurant. That made him feel a bit less certain this could be Schlatt messing with them.

He just- he didn’t know. But Schlatt seemed like the type to leave some sort of taunting message or hidden deal. He didn’t seem like the type who just... ordered food for them with no words. But that left up the question who did it then.

And if they should accept it.

“I could definitely fucking kick their ass. Fucking small people, who I could easily crush.” Tommy claimed as they looped through the hallway. Tubbo rolled his eyes, bumping Tommy.

“Maybe they’ll be at the restaurant when we check after school and you can fight them there.” Tubbo teased. They couldn’t stay out too long. Sally said she was going to be looking into ways to help them. She couldn’t tell anyone but her biology lab had some machines that could do genetic analysis on the mer artifacts she had collected over the years and maybe see what could change them back. After all, if there was a trigger to change, maybe there was one to disappear. She had warned it was unlikely but-

His hands itched at the thought of getting his hands on those machines. The things he could do, the crimes he could commit.

Tommy nudged him as if he could hear his thoughts. Maybe he could, judging by the way the other was smirking. “Absolutely not.” He said, turning the corner. “If you commit any crimes, it better be while I’m there-”

He stopped, words trailing into a hiss. Tubbo froze, eyes narrowing.

Bright green eyes stared at them. “Afternoon.” Clay said, his grin wide and sharp. A bandage covered his nose but Tubbo could see bruising around it, darkening his tan skin. Hench guy number one stood behind him, looking strangely pale.

And behind them was Ranboo, arms spread to block the doorway and feet planted, staring at Clay like he was looking at a dead man walking.

Chapter End Notes

Seems like everyone has more questions than answers... Also, could not resist that cliffhanger. Next chapter, we'll see what Purpled and Ranboo were doing! And what happened with those two. Plus, an investigation at a restaurant. Lots of fun set up in this chapter that I'm looking forward to unfolding.

Red Herring

Chapter Notes

I reworked this chapter multiple times but I think I'm finally happy with it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Ranboo sits in the silence. Tries to revel in it. Remembers the awkward silence is only really fun when he's the one who wants to be silent. Instead, he's staring at Purpled and trying to think about things normal people talk about after getting attacked by killer mer who live in the oceans around their island.

He's feeling very validated in his fear of the ocean right now.

"So." He attempts. "You see that, uh, sports game? With the ball."

Apparently something could get Purpled to look up and that was trying to decode what Ranboo just said. Purpled slowly lifted his head, narrowing his eyes like he was estimating whether it was worth it to strangle Ranboo now or throw him to the sharks later. Valid because haha, wow, that was bad.

"No, I didn't see the game." Purpled said slowly. "Because we were getting attacked during a fucking tropical storm."

"Right. Yeah."

"Do you have anything to say or do you just want to annoy me?" Purpled snapped. Ranboo hunched over the table, glancing away to the door. Purpled was absolutely furious which he knew was going to happen. But why?

When Purpled and Tubbo woke up this morning, he and Tommy had been over the moon. He had never been so happy to have an adult lie to him.

But neither had seemed to remember much of what happened. Tubbo had asked about the storm and Purpled had snapped complaints about waking up in a bathtub, even drained. But Purpled's angry silence told a different story.

"Do you, uh, remember what happened?" Ranboo tries, a little nervous at the answer. Part of him wanted Purpled to remember because wow, he was not sure how to explain it if he didn't. Maybe he'd leave it to Tommy to explain? The other part didn't because trauma bonding seemed way easier in fiction and not like, real life, because wow trauma sucked.

He didn't think it was possible for Purpled's face to darken more but apparently it was!

"Enough." Purpled said, glaring. Jokes on him, Ranboo was too tired to feel anxious about

his anger. "I remember enough."

"So, like do you remember the full moon or--"

"The fucking full moon? What does that mean?" Purpled said, staring at Ranboo. Ranboo winced. Not that part then. But that could only mean--

"-I'm guessing you remember the Punz thing at least. Enough of it." Ranboo said, resisting the urge to wince. There was an audible thump as Purpled put his head back down and Ranboo reached out for a moment, patted the table next to Purpled's hand, before pulling his hand back. "I'm- sorry? I mean, I didn't know the guy but you clearly liked him."

That was an understatement. Ranboo had never seen Purpled light up like he had when he mentioned Punz. Not for money, not for a good day fishing. Closest to how he lit up around them now that they were closer to friends. He hoped they were closer to friends at least.

He had never once heard Purpled talk about his family. At all. They had been sitting at the same table for so long, and yet, Ranboo couldn't tell anyone who Purpled's parents were. They lived on the same island for years!

But he could say that Punz was Purpled's friend.

"I didn't like him. He was useful." Purpled spat, recoiling like a snake. "Don't fucking pry into my business. We're not friends. This is not therapy hours. And I'm tired of you guys treated us like we are friends."

"I- uh, think we are? I mean, you summon a tropical storm together, you stay together." Ranboo said, exhaustion dragging his eyes down to the desk. He should leave it here. He's never been good at nice words or comfort. Usually, he was the one who needed comforting. But-

He had sat at the same desk as Purpled for years. And it was only now that he could maybe, tentatively, call them friends.

How long had it been since he had a friend?

"I think we've talked more in the last weeks than we have in the past few years." Ranboo said quietly. "And I'd like to keep it that way. And I think last night hurt you."

"He didn't hurt me." Purpled snarled. "I'm not that weak."

"Not physically, probably not." Ranboo said, feet tapping at the floor. "But I'm guessing you remember the betrayal and man, that stung me and I barely knew the guy."

It was so weird to have walked around the corner and go from tense but fun chats to mortal terror. If Punz had been just a bit faster, Purpled wouldn't be sitting in front of him right now and they wouldn't have known.

"It wasn't betrayal. That implies I cared." Purpled said, rolling his eyes. Ranboo made a noncommittal hum. "I'm more pissed about what happened to Dogchamp. I didn't get to

check my boat this morning and I swear, if anything happened to it, I'll be paying for a new one with corpses."

"We'll go by after school then." Ranboo said, scratching behind his ear and hoping he didn't feel as awkward as he looked. Purpled was talking to him! Progress! "My parents won't be back for a few more days so you can crash at mine. I live closer to the docks."

And it's unlikely Punz would find you there, he doesn't say. And he doesn't think Purpled understands but the other slowly nods anyways. But. Ranboo was pretty sure he should ask.

"Did you want to go with him?" He says softly and doesn't wince as Purpled's nails squeal against the surface of the desk. "I never saw what happened and after when I found you, you were seriously out of it and I guess, I just, I wanted to make sure we didn't do something wrong and you actually wanted to go with him."

It would crush me, he doesn't say. It makes the fish part of him scream in terror and dig in its nails but he has to ask.

I'd go with you. And Tubbo and Tommy probably would follow, he doesn't say. It's all or none and if one of them breaks, the others follow.

Purpled slowly looks up. And it takes everything Ranboo has not to flinch at the rage (and grief, so much grief and maybe that's why Purpled had been looking away so much) in Purpled's violet eyes.

"He lied to me." He said. "I- what the fuck is wrong with you? Fuck you."

Ranboo slid a twenty across the desk, a wordless apology. Purpled snatched it, sliding it into a hoodie pocket. "Figured I'd ask to be sure." He said. "You've been angry all morning and it's not like I could ask last night."

"I don't want to know what happened last night." Purpled said, his face screwing up. "All I remember is that bastard tackling me and the mer thing and then nothing and I don't think I need to know anymore than that."

"Mood. Except none of the that part and more everything that came after also sucked, haha." Ranboo said. Purpled stared at him and Ranboo scrambled for a distraction. "Hey, do you think they'll be back soon? They've been gone for a long time."

"Fifty says there's something freaky about the food order." Purpled said and Ranboo rolled his eyes.

Something had to be wrong. He had no doubt he would have heard screaming (and explosions) by now if the mer tried to kidnap Tommy and Tubbo. The office wasn't that far away. So the only answer really had to be either their classmates, or something wrong with the order. And Clay and his goons were out today.

(Which made him feel sick to his stomach. It was hazy from terror and confusion but bitterly clear was the memory of Clay walking towards them as Dream turned to face him. The slow

head tilt of a predator considering prey, so very much like Wilbur's when he was about to eat him.

If he hadn't screamed, Clay and his friends would have likely go a wherever they usually went safely. But if he hadn't, he wouldn't have been able to grab Tubbo and take out Bad.

If he hadn't, he wouldn't have left Dream with them.

And now they were missing.)

"I learned not to make a bet with you years ago." Ranboo said, trying to distract himself. Wrote in his journal over and over until he remembered it, even with his poor memory. Purpled had fleeced so much money out of this school between card games and bets.

"You did it a month ago."

"This isn't about me." Ranboo said, pushing out of the chair and walking over to the door. They had maybe an hour left of lunch, then fifteen more minutes before everyone filed in and got quiet. He poked his head out, glancing down the hallway.

Nothing except someone who he very much did not expect to see. Ranboo felt the blood drain from his face as he shut the door so fast, he nearly caught his tie in it.

"Ranboo."

He made a quiet chirping sound, stepping away from the door. Part of his brain told him that this was fine, he was overreacting. They had probably just come in late from being hungover and he was only freaking out because he was just thinking of the worst.

The other part of him told him that something was very wrong but he didn't know what.

"Ranboo." Ranboo jolted, eyes still on the door. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing, I just-" The door rattled and then swung open. And Ranboo felt his voice die in his throat, looking into vibrant green eyes. Clay smirked back, leaning against the door frame.

He looked fine. Not even a wince as he leaned against the door frame. But his face told a different story. An ugly black bruise was fading over one eye, and a bandage was placed on the bridge of his nose. Andy stood behind him, strangely pale and bruises wrapped around his throat. He looked like he had walked out of a bar fight. Not tangled with a killer mer.

Something had Ranboo step forward, trying to use his gangly frame to block the doorway and knowing that it wasn't. He had never been able to intimidate anyone. He had the backbone of an éclair and he was pretty sure his actual bones had the same structural integrity.

It was stupid and weird and he didn't know why. Except, he was pretty sure he did, his stomach feeling sick.

Maybe it was the darkness in Clay's eyes, likely rage at what Ranboo had done. He had been pissed last night and if Dream roughed him up, he'd probably come to take it out on him. Not

like he hadn't before, the time Ranboo scraped together his courage and tried to report the bullying. The two weeks after that had been miserable.

There was no other excuse, Clay never ate at school. Or in the classroom. He liked to brag about going out to the best spots for lunch and flaunt his to go containers.

Ranboo wasn't going to let Purpled feel the consequences of what he had done. "Clay." He said, the word trembling slightly. "I thought you'd be staying home today. You were late to class."

Clay laughed, a shrill wheeze from anger. "I was going to but last night was so interesting, I decided I might as well come in." He said. "Professor won't notice I took the morning off."

Or that lunch ending came with a bruised student. Ranboo could hear the clatter of a chair behind him and tried to brace himself, not wanting Clay to target Purpled. "No hard feelings?" He tried. Surely not. Maybe not. Clay looked fine. Maybe he'd chalk it up to alcohol or he had already taken it out onto Dream? Unlikely but he could hope!

Another wheezy laugh. Andy wouldn't look him in the eyes which was probably a worse sign considering how the guy was twisting a pencil so hard in his hands that it was on the verge of snapping. Like his future spine. Fish brain was being supremely unhelpful, oscillating between telling him to call for help and protect Purpled.

It's so hard to think through the panic when all he really wants is to curl up and go to sleep.

Great. Yeah. Thank you. Why couldn't he have ended up with a mental Google instead of mental fish instincts?

"Why would you say that?" Clay said, green eyes alight with flames. Ranboo felt his heart drop, not sure how to reply. "Really, after everything?"

Right. Fuck. And it wasn't helpful that every time he was looking at Clay, he got more and more stressed out. Did he kill Dream? Was he facing down someone who had managed to kill one of those killer mer? Remembering how easily Techno had nearly broken his ankle, the lithe grace Dream had as he prowled through the shadows, the roaring storm, he wasn't sure.

"How did you--"

"I was just coming over to give you a friendly greeting, why so rude?" Clay said, his eyes crinkling. "You look like you're about to go out the window."

Honestly, a valid plan and Ranboo was not going to feel ashamed of climbing out of a first floor window to escape it. He could hear footsteps behind him. "You can't." He said, hunching in slightly. "Why did he?"

His words failed him at the look in Clay's eyes. What if he didn't know? What if by pushing, he told Clay that Ranboo hadn't expected him to survive it or reveal the mer thing? Hand Clay the secret on the mer living, the hint that they weren't just human anymore. He wasn't sure what was worse, Clay using it against them or mocking him for it.

What was he supposed to say?

(Was it bad to wish that Dream hadn't left him in this situation?)

Too late, he saw Clay's eyes had snapped away from him. "Afternoon." Clay said, his grin wide and sharp. Past him, if he craned his head, he could see Tommy and Tubbo staring in the hallway. In the open, when Clay was looking for an opportunity.

"What are you doing?" Tommy snarled, nearly bumping into Tubbo as they both tried to step in front of the other. "Back off, bitch, before I punch you through a wall."

"Do you really think you could do that?" Clay said, wheezing slightly. The pencil snapped between Andy's hands, earning a quick look from Clay that made him pale again. Their intimidation attempt had failed and Clay cracked down when one of his goons tripped up. He'd feel worse about that except that Andy had gleefully made his life hell, up to and including throwing him into the ocean.

Clay's eyes dipped down to the plastic bag Tommy was carrying and his eyes darkened.

"What do you have there?" He asked. "Who got you that?"

"Fuck off." Tommy said, backing away. Clay took a step closer, ignoring how Ranboo started to follow, ready to get in between.

"Who? I know you don't get those. Who got that for you?" Clay said, glaring at that bag like its very existence offended him.

"None of your fucking business." Tommy snapped. "Now fuck off or I'll rearrange your face."

"If he doesn't, I will." Tubbo said, instantly stepping up to back up Tommy. Ranboo felt someone brush against his back, nearly jumping out of his skin, but when he looked back, it was just Purpled. His violet eyes serious and cold, focused on Clay. Ranboo tried to nudge him back and Purpled nearly pushed him over, shouldering past.

"Bug off, Clay." He snapped. The words dipping slightly near the end as he frowned. "Two vs four is good odds. If you want to take them, everyone's going to hear about the Mako Island Incident."

For a second, Ranboo thought Clay was going to snap and hit Purpled. But instead, he took a step back, hands up. "Alright, alright, no need to be so hostile for a friendly conversation." He said. "Just figured we could talk for a bit but if you're not good with that, I can chill for a bit."

Even so, Ranboo kept a close eye as Clay backed up, Andy jumping back out of the way as Clay sauntered down the hallway. But he didn't turn the corner. Instead, he leaned against the wall, pulling out his phone and scrolling through it while Andy stared at the water fountain.

"Fuck that guy." Tubbo mumbled, nudging Ranboo out of the way so he could go in. Ranboo slowly stumbled back, breaking his gaze from Clay. Who was just standing there. Weirdly.

“Oh, hey, Purpled you’re up!”

“Fuck off.” Purpled said, succinctly. He grabbed Ranboo’s arm, pulling him back to the desk and Ranboo followed numbly. “Why did the order take you so long? Is it poisoned or something? Wouldn’t put it past Clay.”

Tommy shut the door with an angry click. “It’s expensive as fuck.” He said, sauntering over to the desk. “And well, someone fucking knows. Whoever ordered it.”

Purpled, Tubbo, and Tommy glanced to Ranboo and he shook his head mutely. “I would’ve told you and anyways, my parents don’t like me ordering like that.” He said. It was risky enough making orders sometimes but now? With his parents out of town, they’d get extra annoyed if he drew attention to himself.

“Well, whoever ordered it, it’s weird. I looked up the restaurant and this is some fancy stuff.” Tubbo pulled out some boxes and Ranboo shifted slightly, stomach rumbling embarrassingly at the sight of it. Seaweed salad and sashimi. He couldn’t remember the last time he had eaten it but he couldn’t think of anything he wanted to eat more. Tubbo caught his eye, laughing. “Yeah, uh, we figured we could put it to a vote.”

“I say yes. Never turn down free food.” Purpled said, already tugging a box of salad and a box of sashimi to himself. Ranboo eyed the boxes.

“I mean, what do we have to lose? They can’t poison us here and it’s not like they don’t know where we live?” Ranboo offered. “And I don’t know about you, but I’m usually a bit better when I’m not starving.”

“Could be intimidation too.” Purpled said, tapping on the counter, matching the beat of Tommy’s taps. “They’re telling us they can reach us from places we think we’re safe. Even something as small as food.”

“Ugh.” Tommy said emphatically, snagging a box. “I think we should eat.”

“That decides this then.” Tubbo said, grabbing his own boxes and passing two to Ranboo. Ranboo feels something inside of him ease as he bites into the fish. It takes real effort not to gorge himself, his instincts screaming to eat all the food.

It’s the tastiest food he’s ever eaten, fatty and meaty and his tastebuds sing, his instincts finally beginning to settle again.

But it’s marred because he knows Clay is out there, just a while down the hall. And when class starts, he can feel the eyes on the back of his head.

Clay’s still watching.

Ranboo bolts out of the room as soon as the bell rings, nearly stumbling as he headed down the hallway. It feels like he’s running fast, sprinting away from the eyes following him and

then he looks up and Tommy's trotting alongside him with a curious look. And he remembers he's not a sprinter and slows with a wince.

"Tubbo's gonna take your kneecaps." He said in lieu of a greeting. "For having long legs and outrunning him."

"Sorry." Ranboo said, slowly stumbling to a stop. Tommy shrugs, stretching his arms. "I- please don't take my kneecaps. I need those. Like, for living and all."

"Nah, that's a lie from the government." Tubbo told him, slowing to a stop. Ranboo found he wasn't surprised to see Purpled trailing after him, even if he was still avoiding their gazes.

"What has you running, big man?"

"I-" Ranboo glanced up but he couldn't see Clay in the crowd leaving the classroom. The crowd heading towards them. He turned, motioning for them to follow, heading down the hallway. He doesn't speak again until they hit the streets, Tommy's rambling drifting into the haze of worry. "Clay- he shouldn't be here."

"What do you mean?" Tubbo said, glancing back at the school. "He's there, I mean, bruised up but normal."

"Pretty normal for Clay anyways. This isn't the first time that he's come in late." Purpled said, folding his arms. "Or bruised. And it's not like the storm didn't come through last night. They live pretty far from the school."

"I used him as a distraction." Ranboo rushed out, folding in on himself to try and hide. "Last night. When we got separated, the guy who grabbed me met Dream and I saw Clay down the street and yelled at him to get his attention. And he got mad and yelled at Dream and then when the guy who grabbed me did the freaky teleporting thing, I grabbed Tubbo and left him alone with them."

He waits for the shame. The hatred. He had used someone as bait, thrown someone to people they knew were cannibals. Just to buy himself a glimpse of escape that he didn't even know was that helpful.

And Ranboo knew Dream might kill them.

Was he a bad person?

A hand landed on his shoulder. "Look, don't fucking beat yourself up about it." Tommy said. "It was bad place and bad timing and either way, he's a jerk. So fuck him."

"Are you trying to comfort me or agree?" Ranboo said, his voice getting a bit hysterical. Tommy patted extra hard.

"I think what Tommy's trying to say is that you were scared and trying to help and right then, you knew a guaranteed and a likely situation." Tubbo said. "And the guarantee would have likely ended up with us all caught. If you left me with whoever Dream is, we might not have

managed the escape or maybe Dream wouldn't have brought me before Sally and Fundy showed up. You don't know so don't beat yourself up about it."

"But--"

"Ranboo, can you guarantee we could have pulled off our escape without that happening?" Tubbo said sternly. Ranboo mutely shook his head. That was what took Bad out and made sure Tubbo was there. He couldn't guarantee it would have worked otherwise.

"And clearly he's alright." Purpled scoffed, glaring into the distance like he could mentally glare at Clay. "Black eyes and a cut on his face is honestly better than some of the fights I know he got into."

"Do you think he beat them?" Ranboo asked tentatively and Tommy burst out laughing, shaking his head.

"Fuck no. I saw Dream for five seconds and he could have probably kicked Clay's ass and the rest of his goons. Techno ripped a shark in half, if Dream was anything like that, he's probably just as bad."

Ranboo winced and Tubbo smacked Tommy on the arm. "He was probably distracted." Tubbo said. "There was a lot going down at the beach and the tropical storm would have kicked up soon after that. Easy explanation."

"Easy explanation that makes Clay mad at us." Ranboo said quietly. And when Clay got mad, he got violent. And they couldn't deal with that right now, not with everything going on. They needed to find a cure and deal with the mer and just- not deal with the trouble that Ranboo had accidentally dragged them into.

"Boo, you know we're not mad at you for this, right?" Tubbo said, glancing at Tommy who shrugged and shook his head. "You did what you could and it's not like Clay wouldn't still be a problem."

"I can handle Clay." Purpled said firmly. He doesn't meet Ranboo's eyes. "He and his friends got secrets they'd rather not have me sell. And Mako Island is just part of it. Do you think that's the first time he's been a coward?"

Ranboo's shoulders ease a bit, some of the tenseness leaving him. They weren't mad. They weren't. They weren't mad at him. And he was so pathetically grateful for that.

"I could just punch him." Tommy said sulkily. "Like, bam! Mess with us again, why don't you? Now, fuck off."

"We'll table that for now." Tubbo said cheerily, bumping Ranboo's arm. "We can handle him. It's not like he's the hardest thing we have to deal with. Like a week ago, maybe annoying to deal with. Now? I can't remember anything that happened last night and I nearly got kidnapped. That's abysmal, big man. That's not happening again."

“That, I didn’t influence.” Ranboo mumbled, but it still made him smile. Just a bit. He didn’t know what he would do if the other three got mad at him. Hide in the library probably. The librarians didn’t mind him stress building things out of books.

“And as a distraction, let’s go scope out the weird restaurant and bakery before I literally pass out.” Tubbo said, spinning around. “Like, seriously now. I think if I have to spend another hour awake, I’m going to start biting people.”

“Definitely don’t want that.” Tommy said with the haunted look of someone who has had that exact thing happen to them. He spins, pointing in a random direction. “Follow me! I’m like a fucking human GPS.”

“Opposite direction.” Purpled drawls. Tommy spun around again and glared at him.

“And how the fuck do you know that?”

“I sell to a restaurant down the street.” He said, turning and ambling down the street. “I know the locations of all my clients and future ones. You can take that route, but you’ll go clear across town.”

“Yeah, I knew that. I was just fucking testing you.” Tommy said sullenly, stomping after Purpled. Ranboo lingered slightly, held back by Tubbo’s hand on his arm.

“Even if he died, we wouldn’t have cared.” Tubbo said quietly. “It’s terrible maybe, but then we’re all terrible people in this together. If I had to kill him myself to protect you, I would have considered it.”

“Maybe we should be more worried about the fish brain.” Ranboo whispers. Because that part of him is preening. It’s proud. It’s happy to have Tubbo tell him that.

But Tubbo smiles back. “Nah, ask Tommy. I’ll do whatever it takes.” He said, finally letting go of Ranboo’s arm. “I’d just use whatever I could think of beforehand but if it came down to it? I would have done exactly the same thing, Boo.”

It’s strangely comforting. To have someone tell you that they care so much that they would kill for you. “I’ll think about that, Bee.” Ranboo said. He scrambled at Tubbo’s questioning face. “You started calling me Boo so I thought we moved into nickname stage? Like the books.”

“Tommy calls you a nickname, why doesn’t he get one?”

“Tommy makes my name into a curse, I don’t know what stage that is.”

But Purpled is right despite Tommy complaining the entire way. The path takes them to a little building, tucked in at the end of an alleyway just off the marina. It’s cute, almost cozy, a little hand drawn sign in the window proclaiming it to be open. Standing here, he can almost ignore the crowd of tourists that he knows must be nearby, goggling over the remains of the storm.

It feels private. Like knowing about it means you've stumbled upon some kind of secret. A sign above the door proclaims it to be the best restaurant and bakery in town. The outside was painted in soft pastels, vibrant flowers blooming in the window boxes.

Counting Sheep

Above a smaller door to the left, the one he'd tentatively label the door for the bakery, is a different name.

Coconut Flower

"Doesn't look like a place where they would shop." Tubbo mumbled, pushing his way inside the sushi door. Ranboo shrugs and follows, the four nearly tumbling through the door. It's surprisingly quiet, it's late enough he would have thought the dinner rush would have started by now. But the only person was the guy wiping down the worn wooden tables.

A counter took up most of the opposite wall, some kind of bar area behind it. If bars had knives and decorative plants. Probably where the sushi was made. Pastel stools lined the counter if people didn't want the tables. The art along the walls was-

Ocean photos, so creepily detailed they made him shudder

He glanced up, red and blue glasses flashing in the light. "What are you here for?" He asked. "haven't seen you here before."

Tubbo gently shoved Tommy before he could speak, smiling far too sweetly. "A friend of ours got us food and we wanted to pay them back but we don't know which friend. It's a surprise so we thought we'd ask."

Ranboo should probably be a bit more concerned about how Tubbo could lie so easily on command. But it worked because the guy shrugged, setting the rag down.

"I didn't take an order like that but my bosses did." He said. "One moment."

He jogged to the counter, ringing a little bell and briefly distracting Tubbo which is a Mistake. "Why the fuck are you bald." Tommy spits out before Tubbo can cover his mouth again, earning an angry glare.

"That's just my hair." The other guy- Jack said as he scooped up the rag, heading towards the window. That's what his name tag said. Ranboo shuffled awkwardly, starting to glance around. Hopefully the bosses would come out soon, they were getting perilously close to an hour.

There was a soft click. Ranboo saw a shadow step away from the door. Someone deciding not to come in.

"Guys." Purpled said, his voice tight. He tilted his head, towards the corner opposite of the little counter. Half hidden behind a decorative plant was a plaque and a photo. It was obviously part of an employee wall, with Jack's photo having a question mark under it. It takes Ranboo a moment to see what Purpled is eyeing.

Niki and Puffy, Owners.

Behind them, Jack flips the sign to Closed.

Chapter End Notes

Ranboo: Might have nearly killed someone

Tommy: Goals

Purpled: so?

Tubbo: Bet

Fun things happening in next chapter. Fun for who? Mostly me, to be honest. The boys are not going to have a great time.

Also 100k woooooooo!

Fish Out Of Water

Chapter Notes

The boys are trapped!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled moved the fastest, reaching into his pocket and pulling out his scaling knife. Ranboo yelped but skittered closer at the sight of the knife. It wasn't his scaling knife, he had swiped it off of Sally's kitchen counter but it was sharp and would serve well enough.

Fucking hell, of course they ended up with this happening again. When would he ever get a fucking break? He wasn't paid enough for this.

And all because someone, he glared at Tubbo, wanted to get a description. If they got out of this, he was going to lock them all inside a box because clearly that was the best solution right now. They were magnetically attracted to trouble it felt like.

And it didn't help that he still felt like he had been run over by a boat that was carrying a metric truck load of exhaustion. That had to be some sort of weird fish side effect, he had stayed up for days on end before doing night fishing and never experienced anything like this.

Jack turned, jerking back at the sight of the knife. "Where did you get that so fast?" He asked, shocked. Tommy cackled maniacally.

"Yeah, bitch! Not so scary now are you?" He said. Purpled rolled his eyes as Tommy looked at him. "Can I have a knife too? I want to stab him. He looks like a wrongun and he's locked us in here. That's wrongun stuff."

Ranboo spluttered as Purpled pulled another knife out of his pocket and slapped into Tommy's hands. "Pay me later." He said. Tommy scoffed and Purpled pointed the knife at him. "Pay me later."

"Please tell me you didn't have knives at school." Ranboo said, despairingly, staring at the floor. "Purpled, where did you even get those?"

"Why don't you have knives?"

"That's enough." A crisp voice cut through the beginning of Ranboo's approaching mental breakdown. Purpled turned his knife on the newcomer, meeting amused blue eyes. She was... more normal than he was expecting.

It put him on edge. P- Techno and Wilbur hadn't exactly looked bizarre but there had been something distinctly other about them that reminded of the times he sat in his boat and watched a shark swim by. The slow grace, the motion of a creature that didn't consider him more than a possible snack. Like they were simply playing along.

She matched her picture, that was his first bizarre thought. Bright pink hair, slightly wavy, with blue green eyes. Clothes that looked soft on the first glance but were recognizably expensive. Purpled could sense money from five hundred feet away, he knew high quality when he saw it.

The picture of a wealthy retiree playing at business. She'd fit in perfectly with all the other little shops with her careless placement and lack of advertising.

But the moment he saw her, the fish instincts in the background of his head sat down and shut up. Dangerous. Ranboo nudged his shoulder as if to step in front of him and the others but Purpled sidestepped him. One of them had the knife here and it was definitely not Ranboo.

Her eyes crinkled. "I admit, I kind of expected this." She admitted. Jack made a rude squawking noise that made his shoulders involuntarily tense. He did not like that sound. He couldn't tell why, he just knew that he did not like that sound at all.

"And you didn't warn me?" Jack snapped, gesturing at them. "How am I supposed to take a knife off of a pup? Why do they have knives? Who gave them that? They're not supposed to have knives."

"Relax Jack. It's not like they could hurt you." She stepped to the side, sitting herself on one of the worn stools. Every movement spoke of casual, effortless power, ignoring her small stature and soft clothes. Purpled didn't lower the knife, remembering relentless pursuit and a hand on his hood. "Would you like to sit?"

"I'd rather not and my friends would agree with me." Tubbo said, feet turned towards the door. Purpled longed for the days where the most complicated problem he had to deal with was negotiating pay and bullying others out of the best fishing spots. He missed that. "And I think we need to go right now."

"Oh, but you just got here! You can't leave that soon." Niki said, placing her chin in her hands. "You know, I expected you to be a bit, well, bigger. After what happened last night. But you're so little."

"Fuck you! I'm the biggest of men." Tommy said, puffing up. Purpled bristled at how Niki gave him a look that reeked with condescension. If she wanted to look down on the- him, then she could pay him. He wouldn't accept anything less. "I'll spawn a fucking hurricane in this shop, don't think I won't!"

"You won't." Newcomer. Purpled tracked them to the interior door, bakery side. She actually looked weirder than Niki or Jack, wearing clothes straight out of a pirate film and her hair wildly curly. "Don't think I didn't see what happened last night. Without the moon, there's no way you can get enough power to do that again. Or anything big, quite honestly."

At the mention of the moon, Purpled felt a shiver like a live wire running down his back.

Punz?

A silver glow

and it all m e l t s a w a y

The pirate ducked, letting the knife fly over her head in a flash of silver. She planted her feet, hands on her hips as she stared at Purpled. “Now what was that for?” She asked. “Why would you go around randomly attacking people? We’re not going to hurt you.”

“We’re leaving now.” Purpled insisted, starting to herd the others back towards the door. He was tired and not even getting paid for this. He had no patience to talk to these weird people. He wanted to go, yesterday preferably.

The door didn’t budge. It didn’t even shift as he pressed his hand against it. Tubbo cursed softly. “Lock is on the outside.” He mumbled. Purpled glared at it.

That was definitely off. Not noticeably so but he kicked himself for not seeing it earlier. There was no reason to have a lock on the outside but no lock or way to unlock it from the inside. Not in a restaurant at least.

“Leaving so soon?” Niki said, leaning forward. Purpled tried to take a calming breath, shoulders tense with rage and other emotions he didn’t want to name. He had told himself that this would never happen again. “I thought you wanted to talk with us?”

It was a good trap, if childishly simple. It relied solely on him and Ranboo never visiting this place while living on the island. A decision made out of exhaustion to try and get what information they could. And it slipped right past all of them that maybe the restaurant was involved and it wasn’t just some spur of the moment order. A decision made with far too little sleep and he could feel it weighing on him now, encouraging him to rest.

Purpled wished he hadn’t given Tommy his second knife. He needed more knives.

“Our question has been answered already so we’re going to show ourselves out.” Tubbo said, his voice tight. “I’m assuming you’re the reason the food got sent to us out of nowhere and that answers the questions we had.”

“Oh, that.” Pirate- Puffy, Purpled corrected himself. Knowledge was wealth and she clearly matched the photo on the wall. And this knowledge worried him. Unless she went through the outside door of the bakery without them noticing... There had to be another person they hadn’t seen yet.

Tubbo met his eyes, jerking his head towards the door. Purpled tilted his head, neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Purpled glanced over the exits, calculating their best route. He could break the door but Jack was leaning against the shop window only a few feet away. He wasn’t looking at them, well, he was but his eyes were on Tommy who was holding a knife with a dark look. Smart.

Puffy by the bakery door. Niki by the door leading into the back. At least one unknown outside. Purpled nodded his head in confirmation at Tubbo and saw the other frown.

How much hazard pay would this be worth? And should he just demand access to Ranboo's bank account at this point?

"I thought it would be a nice gesture." Puffy said, leaning against the doorway. "You know, like a welcoming gift. Post full moon can hit you hard and you did some heavy magic last night. You had to be starving."

Purpled's frown got even sharper. That explained why they were so hungry this morning. Normally, he was used to a lean period even if his growing skills at raking in cash meant they became fewer and farther in between. But this morning, it had felt like he had gone a month without food.

"What the fuck did you do?" Tommy said, his shoulders tense. Purpled resisted the urge to sway him, far too familiar. Instead, he aimed a glare at Tommy. Their goal should be on getting out, not pissing the mer off. Ranboo and Tubbo stepped closer together, as if nervous of the repercussions, but Ranboo didn't stray too far from him. Couldn't, in their little huddle. "Fucking hell, did you drug us? Are you a wrongun?"

Of course the other would jump to demands. Tubbo met his eyes, shrugging with a smile and Purpled rolled his. Tommy had never felt a hand on the back of his hood, about to pull him into the water and-

He brutally cut himself off there. There was no need to keep going down that road. It never led to anything good for him and his eyes should be on the money here.

"I didn't do anything, that's not where my abilities lie." Niki said innocently. But it's betrayed by the sharp smile on her face. "You're more inexperienced at this than I thought you would be. I thought that old guy would at least give you some information."

"Why the fuck would we listen to Philza?" Tommy spat. Purpled tilts his head. Who's Philza? He doesn't recognize the name at all. Ranboo's hand lands on his shoulder, shaking his head.

"Mer. With Wilbur and Techno." He whispers. Of fucking course. Seemed like everyone was a mer nowadays. And Purpled's information network had found any of it. He was floundering blind.

If he had known more about it than maybe he could have guessed-

"You need more sleep, you look absolutely exhausted." Niki said. "I was surprised when Jack's magic put you at the school. You were up more than half the night. Pups aren't supposed to stay awake that long. We have a room in the back you can crash in for a bit."

Purpled rolled his eyes even as he tucked the information in the back of his mind as yet another thing he hated about this transformation. It might be a lie but he wasn't sure if he could bet on that information and he had never been one to ignore what could be useful.

It at least explained why his normal schedule left him more tired than usual, something he thought was due to the fact of killer mer being around

“We’ll pass.” Purpled snapped. He kicked the door with his heel, eyebrow raising as it didn’t shake, but instead gave off a cascade of amber sparks. A web of gold lined the door, holding it solid and firm. Ranboo’s hand tightened on his shoulder.

“Are you hurt?” Ranboo said, his voice pitching up slightly. Dumbass. He kicked the door, he didn’t get his ankle nearly snapped or anything. He had kicked in plenty of doors before. But the word he mouthed afterwards wasn’t concern.

Distraction

Purpled turned and punched the glass as hard as he could, watching as the foggy glass spiderwebbed with cracks with a loud creaking sound. But as soon as they appeared, they were outlined in gold, melting away like ice in a fish cooler in midafternoon. Niki made a surprised whistling sound, making Purpled tense, biting back a near involuntary response. It ached almost, not to respond.

“Are you okay?” She said, worried. She whistled again, trying to get a response, and Purpled shook with the effort of trying to bite it back.

“That wasn’t a good idea.” Jack said with a snort. His eyes were hidden by red and blue glasses, hiding his reaction, but Purpled hoped he flinched. Bastard.

“I’m fine.” Purpled said. The golden web was fading by now but it was definitely still there. If he had to guess, it was some sort of magic. What it did, that he didn’t know. They really didn’t want them walking out this door. Ranboo cast a worried look at him.

“It’s not polite to lock people in.” Tubbo said, his hands going to his pocket and Purpled raised an eyebrow. Tubbo tilted his head, not looking at him.

“Yeah, fuck off.” Purpled drawled, dragging the eyes back to him. “Or I’m robbing you and burning this place down?”

Did Tubbo sneak something as well? He pulled something out, pressing it into Tommy’s hand as soon as the others’ eyes left him. “We’re not children and we’d prefer not to be treated that way.”

“But you are, aren’t you?” Puffy said, looking almost surprised. “Even if you count the human way, you’re so young. You need to have caregivers, protectors, and mer need a pod.”

Tubbo pushed in front of Tommy, shielding him from the mer and blocking him from view. Purpled couldn’t help a confused look for a moment. Tommy was the one with the knife and he was almost certain that the other was rabid. If any of them had fish rabies, then it would most definitely be Tommy. And weirder, Tommy allowed it.

He had never seen the other not protest when Tubbo was shielding him. Something was up. Purpled followed Tubbo’s lead, almost casually side stepping to examine the window and

getting a scoff from Jack.

“You can’t break the glass, you know that? It’s practically indestructible.” Jack said. “Face it, you’re done. End of the line here. You’re coming with us.”

“You could at least be a bit nicer about it. They’re delicate. You have to treat pups gently.” Puffy scolded. Her smile was sweet but Purpled found himself disliking it more and more by the second. He was most definitely striking this shop off his future client list, with prejudice. He had thought it to be good that he never heard any juicy gossip about this place but no wonder. He doubted many survived to spread gossip. “Look, why don’t we all just have a nice sit down with some snacks and talk? You’re likely hungry again.”

...he was. And that made him furious. How the fuck was he already hungry again? He had whipped through the sashimi and seaweed salad so fast it should have made him sick. And yet, already his stomach was beginning to feel empty.

What was happening to him?

At least the fish brain seemed to agree, if for a reason that he preferred not to think about. It was on edge when he looked at Puffy with her promises of food. Neither of them wanted to take it, it feeling wrong somehow to accept the food and promises of protection and shelter, given by someone who wasn’t-

Who wasn’t him. He hated eating food from strangers. That was it.

“Tubbo, do you remember that warning you gave about the biting.” Ranboo whispered, hunching over slightly. Tubbo nodded slowly. “I think I understand now. I want to bite someone.”

“I’ve taught you so well.” Tubbo whispered, looking almost happy despite the circumstances. As if. Everyone knew stabbing was better than biting. Or stealing their wallet. Purpled eyed Jack speculatively. He cleared his throat. “Look, I know that you might consider us young but I think it’s better if we all just go. You don’t want us, it’s just a weird mer thing. That’s all. We’re old enough to take care of ourselves and I can promise we can make your life a living hell. It really just isn’t worth it.”

“Yeah, uh, you don’t even know us?” Ranboo said, fidgeting with the corner of his suit jacket. Tommy let out a curse, making Purpled eye the pair speculatively. “Which makes your claims of, well, adopting us weird?”

“We don’t know you right now, I suppose, but we can get to know each other.” Niki said with a casual wave, completely ignoring Tubbo’s and Ranboo’s very valid point. None of the mer knew them and yet, they were completely invading their lives. Purpled loathed it, but not as much as when they tried to get to know them. “We have experience with stubborn little pups, I’m sure we can easily handle you. You’ll be so sweet. I’ve been wanting some cute little pups for our nest.”

“Sweet? Tubbo?” Purpled couldn’t help but scoff. Tubbo shot him an innocent look that looked somehow sinister. In the short time of forced contact, Tubbo had demonstrated to be

completely willing to lie, blackmail, and blow people up. And stubborn enough to get into a boat chase with a whale.

He couldn't imagine the other being sweet for these assholes. Maybe with just their group, not relevant, but no. Not with Tubbo's look promising murder. There was a strange thump from outside and Purpled eyed the foggy glance. It was so faint that he nearly missed it. Maybe someone had noticed?

And then he realized Niki was looking at him and Purpled recoiled. No one ever described him as sweet (except-) because he wasn't. Sweet didn't bring in money and the world crushed those whose only personality trait was innocence. The very thought of it, of being vulnerable-fuck no. Fuck that. He wanted his knife back. It was only Ranboo's tight grip on his shoulder that kept him from turning and bolting through the window.

"Look, what choice do you have? Nothing at all." Jack said, pushing off the window. He left ashy footprints where he walked, Purpled noticed, eyes narrowing. "It's us or the other bastard pods. You gonna go with Schlatt? Or Dream?"

"Don't make fun of my duckling." Puffy scolded. "Just because I'm angry he left to start his own pod doesn't mean you can be rude to him."

"Fine, anyways. You're coming home with us." Jack said, shaking his head. "Or even Philza? The guy's so old he's practically senile at this point."

"That's rather rude, mate."

Four things happened at once.

One, Ranboo's grip grew unbearably tight, pulling him backwards.

Two, Purpled saw the door open, golden light flashing bright, snapping with the sound of seagulls cawing.

Three, Niki jumped out of her chair, pulling a fucking sword out of nowhere as Puffy pushed away so hard from the doorway that part of it snapped off.

Four, someone roared outside, making the fish in the back of his head wail with terror.

"I got your text." The man smiled, seagull on his shoulder preening. He eyed Tommy with a cheery smile, making Purpled try to push in front of the other. But stupidly, Tommy pushed past him, brandishing the knife. "Well, Wil got your message and then he passed it to me. He's not allowed to have his phone right now."

Purpled raised an eyebrow, tense as he stared at Tommy. The other shrugged, not meeting his eyes. "Wil gave me his number way back in the music store. We needed someone to open the door. It fucking worked, okay? I didn't want them here either, well, maybe to see Wilbur get his ass kicked."

Tubbo shook his head. "My idea." He said. A phone. That was what he passed on. Purpled gritted his teeth, looking away. He wanted to feel angry but he had to admit it worked. And

he doubted Tommy would try to betray them.

“Philza.” Niki said, the words edged with a hiss. The name was unfamiliar and yet familiar. Ranboo had clearly recognized it, one of the mer from last night. And yet, looking at him, Purpled had no clue who he was. If they met, it was gone with the rest of his memory. “You’re violating the territory lines right now.”

“If we’re comparing crimes, the crime of pup stealing is far worse.” Purpled recognized that look. Greed. When Philza surveyed their little group, his eyes were greedy, lingering over the four of them. His hands twitching as if he was longing to reach forward and take instead of just watching. “Trying to take all four pups? A little ambitious for you.”

“I’ve raised just as many pups as you have.” Puffy contested hotly, stepping forward. Philza tilted his head back. When the sea gull cawed, it sounded suspiciously like a laugh.

“And how many of those stayed?” Puffy hissed. Her hands flicked, scales swarming over them and forming claws. “The pups are mine and they’ll be coming with us. Unless you want Techno to tear off your remaining son’s head.”

“We have parents.” Ranboo squeaked. And in a rare moment of agreement, all of the mer rolled their eyes.

“Human parents. Do those even count?” Jack said, skeptical. Purpled didn’t need parents to know he wanted to kill everyone in this room. What happened to the days where the most he had to worry about was getting more money?

“Those are easily dealt with.” Philza said, as if he wasn’t talking about casual murder. Then again, thinking of the mer when they thought he and Ranboo were human, he couldn’t bring himself to be surprised.

Ranboo squeaked at the ominous answer, ducking down behind Purpled. Purpled had to fight not to tense when the other leaned close to his ear. “On the signal, we go.”

Finally. He wouldn’t have the chance to rob anyway but the trade off of getting out of here and not having to deal with it anymore? He’d just add it to his ongoing hazard pay calculation. Whatever stupid (okay, maybe not that. For all the downsides of having to deal with having them around, Tubbo, Tommy, and Ranboo could be surprisingly competent. Then again, they were exhausted enough to walk straight into a trap) plan this was, it would be worth it.

He didn’t have to guess what the signal was. “Fuck you all!” Tommy said. And then he flicked his hand, the ground below him bursting into flames. The fire spread quickly across the wood, Jack jumping as the fire swarmed around his feet. Gold sparked from the floor, but none of them cared if the damage was fixed. What mattered was the surprise.

Purpled capitalized on the surprise, turning and bolting for the door, forcing his tired muscles to their full capacity. For a moment, his eyes met surprised (and amused?) blue before he threw himself into a slide, ducking under the other’s arm. A hand traced the back of his neck, closing just a bit too soon as Purpled threw himself out into the sunlight.

Ranboo barrelled past, half dragging Tubbo. But behind him, Purpled heard a shocked yelp. Despite the part of him that told him to drop the deadweight and go, he turned back. Philza had one arm around Tommy, ignoring the other's cursing and struggles. The knife clattered to the ground with a sharp flick of Philza's wrist.

"Little pups shouldn't have sharp things." He cooed, arms tightening. And for a moment-

Betrayal, hands pinning him to the ground, someone who he thought was a good worker (an older brother), weapons falling away as his head was turned up to the sky-

He moved without thinking, the wind whipping around him as he slammed into Philza. The other stumbled back with a grunt, but Purpled ignored him. His hands grabbed Tommy's, the other meeting his hold, yanking forward. He had hauled full nets out of the ocean. This should be a breeze.

Instead, for a moment, they stood at a standstill. "You can't run forever." Philza said, shaking his head slowly. And then rainbow curls sideswiped and Tommy was stumbling into Purpled's arms as he pulled the other back into the sunlight.

"Run better." He said with a huff, turning and yanking the other forward. Tommy scoffed.

"Like you're that good at it." He said. He jerked his chin forward. "Now how do we get past these fuckers?"

Techno was locked into some kind of fight with someone wearing bright gold. And past them-

"Purpled. You weren't at your boat."

Someone he didn't want to hear.

Chapter End Notes

For those wondering how they ended up walking into this, yes, they're smart. They're also kids. Who are exhausted and running on adrenaline and stress and didn't make the connection that maybe killer mer own a restaurant. Send Purpled knives, he needs them right now.

In Too Deep

Chapter Notes

This was a fun chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Breath in. He had no idea what he was doing. His heart lurched at the idea of facing them again. Breath out. He wanted to fucking kill him. He would fucking kill him. No one did that to him and got away with it.

“In any other fucking situation, I would say to go absolutely feral.” Tommy said behind him, dragging Purpled out of his plans for impending murder. Tommy’s hand was far too warm as it moved to grab his. “But I think if we don’t run, Tubbo is going to blow us up while we sleep. He has manic eyes right now.”

“Bold of you to believe I sleep.” Purpled hissed. His eyes darted to Tubbo, who was huddled against the side of the alley, Ranboo fidgeting behind him. Tubbo stared at him, narrowing his eyes when he saw Purpled looking. And surprisingly, Purpled found himself to be hesitating.

He shouldn’t.

Years of fishing made him far stronger than he looked. Years of self defense had made him far more dangerous as well. There was a knife just behind him if he was quick enough to grab it and he could feel something stirring in his veins at the thought of a fight.

Punz may have taken him down before but the circumstances could and would be far different this time. He doubted the other would truly fight him, allowing him to hold the advantage and use this against him. Maybe he wouldn’t be able to kill him but he had no doubt that he could cause a lot of damage. There was no reason for him not to take his revenge and no reason he should let the presence of these three to change his mind.

What could Tubbo really do to him? Why should he care about how the other looked at him?

It was safer and he would finally get rid of these feelings that were plaguing him. Punz would have heard the message.

Tommy’s hand tightened around his. “If you’re that fucking dumb, I guess I’ll help you.” Tommy said, but despite his tone, Purpled could see how the other was tense. Ready for a fight. Moron. It would be hard enough to fight and get out by himself.

There was a crash further up the alley, Techno had pinned the golden guy. Behind them, he could hear hushed conversation as the Philza guy faced down the other three.

It was the perfect opportunity. Punz was slowed as he tried to get around the two fighting. He could get the knife before Philza could grab him, distracted as the other likely was with Niki, Puffy, and Jack. This situation would be over.

Punz says his name again. He knows he does but he blocks it out, just as background static. He didn't want to hear the other say his name again. He didn't deserve to say his name, not after that. Purpled regret even telling him it.

Purpled pulled Tommy over to Tubbo, ignoring his splitter of surprise. "I thought we were going to fight!" Tommy hissed. Purpled pulled his hand away, jamming them into his pocket as he looked away.

"Don't be a dumbass, we're going to get caught if we do that." He snapped, looking up and down the alley. The restaurant blocked one end and the other had three mer. A few windows lined the alley, but now that he was looking at them, he could tell the businesses or homes inside were obviously gone or taken over. The fronts were a facade. "Now, what's the genius plan to get out?"

How had he missed that this place was obviously wrong? Years of trading and dealing on this island, and yet never once had he felt like approaching the restaurant or the shops to either side. The restaurant had all the markers of a perfect client, and yet something had always come up. He was sick that day or heard of a better fishing spot or someone moved on his territory.

And wracking his brain, he had never heard of anyone actually visiting the shops to the side. The restaurant yes, but those cheesy tourist stores?

What did these Mer do?

"I thought we could climb." Tubbo said with a contemplative look in his eyes. Purpled met his eyes, challenging him to say anything. "We're tired but the windowsills are sturdy. If we're careful, we can climb in and leave through the front."

Despite that, his tone was quiet. Weak. And Purpled could instantly see why. Even if Tommy and Ranboo somehow managed to stack on top of each other, there was no way to reach the window and get the momentum to break it. For all of Tommy's bravado, he didn't think the other could support the weight of two people and he had seen Ranboo crumple trying to lift a heavy box. But neither he or Tubbo were tall enough to trade in.

No way. It'd take way too much time to get up, let alone break it without attention. Purpled didn't need his history of robbery to know this wouldn't work.

He glanced up the alley. Punz had stopped, watching them on the other side of the fight, quiet now. What had to be a mocking call of a name had stopped. Instead the other was glancing at his phone. Weirdly, the ground was beginning to warp around, pulling Techno back and blocking him before he could finish the other. He ignored the feeling of blue eyes, snarling to himself as the other was waiting for them to be flushed out. Punz was fast, he wasn't sure how fast, but he was pretty sure he was faster. Tired, but faster and willing to prove it.

The windows weren't an option. The front path was the obvious solution. Only three men, two were fighting. Purpled didn't want to fall off a wall when there was an obvious solution that let him punch Punz on the way out.

It could work. The brawl blocked a good chunk of the alley as the two fought but if they moved fast and stuck along the wall, they could make it.

"We could just-" Tommy said, glaring at Punz. The other tilted their head, raising a cool eyebrow and making Tommy vibrate with rage. Tubbo rolled his eyes fondly, looking at Purpled like he was also supposed to be fond of this guy. Purpled didn't look back. "Attack. Murder. Kill."

Purpled's phone buzzed. Buzzed again. He didn't look at it.

"I mean-" Tubbo hesitated, yawning widely. His next words were a bit more slurred. Purpled couldn't help yawning as well, setting off Tommy and Ranboo. "I still don't think we can fight him. We could just run past them, before they decide we're not cornered enough and the entire situation collapses."

"He didn't come alone." Ranboo said quietly. He flinched under all of their gazes. "There's no way he'd show himself like this if he didn't. He knows Purpled's angry at him. He's the bait."

Purpled glanced up the alley, but didn't see anything. Punz was relaxed but that could be explained as his natural bastard tendencies.

Purpled tried to suppress the frustration he felt, but it still leaked into his tone. "How would you know?" He asked. Ranboo shrugged awkwardly.

"I mean, one against four isn't great odds? From experience? And Techno and the other guy have been avoiding him. I don't think Punz is as strong as them, which means they have to have a reason why they'd choose to take another threat out before dealing with him." Ranboo said. "I dunno, man. Just feels wrong and off. He's not the only one."

Purpled thought of those words, glancing up towards Punz again. "He's right." He said slowly. "There's no way that Punz would approach the situation like this. He'd want the upper hand. He should have surprised us."

Like he did when-

He shook his head as if he could shake the thoughts away, cursing. "Now what then?" He said. "The only reason they haven't snatched us up is because we're blocked in. And they're right. Where are we supposed to go? Every route leads to them and if we try to fight, there's no way all of us get out."

One knife in the restaurant, one he could maybe grab, but that still left the other unarmed. "I have the fire thing." Tommy volunteered. "I mean, not all of it because it feels like pulling teeth. Like, real bastard teeth that like to stick and refuse to move. But I can do it."

“Table the arson. I know, it’s insane I’m saying that. But table it right now.” Tubbo said. He was staring at the restaurant, a mischievous smile spreading over his features. “That’s the route.”

What? Purpled tried to follow his gaze. Philza was still leaning in the doorway, his posture deceptively calm as he faced down Niki and Puffy even as they argued. Did Tubbo want to fight him? Could they even fight him?

“Not that way. They’ll catch us.” Tubbo said, shaking his head. “Ranboo, how fast can you do the ice thing?”

“Kinda fast?” Ranboo said, squinting slightly. “I mean, I haven’t practiced but I could freeze pretty fast in the pond. But I dunno man, I don’t think I can do much of it.”

“That’s fine, we only need to slow them down.” Tubbo said, his voice hushed. Purpled tilted his head. “We know there has to be a back door leading out of the building. They’re only blocked the restaurant door but-“

“You want to try running through the restaurant to the back.” Purpled said. “That’s-“

“Genius?”

“Stupid.” Purpled crushed it immediately. There was no point in playing around here, not with their life at stake. “There’s three people in there, can we really outrun all of them? And how likely is it that no one is over there?”

If they ran in again, they’d choke themselves. They had put so much effort into getting out because in a tight space, there was nothing they could do. One mer, maybe. Three? With limited escape routes? If this went wrong, they’d be well and truly trapped.

“How likely is it that they don’t we’d do something that dumb? It’s the stupidity that makes it smart!” Tubbo challenges. “We capitalize on the surprise and use it to get to the door. We don’t have a lot of magic, but we have enough to slow them down while we slip through. That gives an entire building’s worth of space to run!”

“What’s the worst that can fucking happen?” Tommy said like he’s not agreeing solely to the plan because Tubbo is the one who came up with it. Like it isn’t a completely stupid plan that banks on how fast their exhausted group can run and some maybe magic, right through the lion’s den. It was one thing to run out the alley, another to run into a building that maybe had an exit. “You gotta better plan?”

Purpled sighed in frustration, tensing as another crash echoed. “I don’t have any time to come up with a better plan.” He griped, adding another charge onto his mental tally. The “bastard annoyed me” charge.

“It’ll be okay.” Ranboo said, shrugging at Purpled’s skeptical look. “I mean, probably not but if we can do this, we’re free!”

“Sure.” Purpled said, pushing away from the wall. This had to be up there with one of the stupidest things he had ever done. He didn’t even know how to top this. But here goes.

They shuffled to the other side of the alley, Purpled keeping a watchful eye on the brawl. He was fairly certain it looked like they were trying to get a better angle to get past them, but he couldn’t be sure. Not with so many eyes on them. This close, when he glanced back, he could see the bakery door was unlocked.

Made sense. They likely hadn’t thought any of them could get past Puffy. Let alone run back inside. Fuck em.

“Who’s ready to do some stupid.” Tommy said in that annoying sing song. His grin was lopsided and tight. “This is dumb. This is so dumb.”

“I’ll say it’s a good idea if it gets you to hush.” Purpled threatened, turning back to the door. If he got through this, he might as well put Ranboo and the others on a payment plan. There was no way they could pay him back in their lifetime.

Even so, he waited a half second, only sprinting forward when he saw the other three had started running. Tubbo hit the door like a bowling ball made out of rage and a need for property destruction, making it swing open. This time, no golden sparks appeared, allowing them to run in.

Bringing up the rest, only Purpled heard the cry of rage. He got a flash of red and blue glasses, Jack appearing at the adjoining doorway. “What the fuck are you doing?” He swore, stepping forward. Ranboo made a strange flicking motion. “I- what the fuck!”

Crystalline frost raced up his shoes, pinning them and making Purpled feel an odd sense of deja vu. He shoved forward, pressing the other up as he slumped slightly. “Don’t you dare fall here.” He snapped. “I’m not going to carry you out of this.”

Ranboo let out a wheezy laugh as he staggered into a run, noticeably slowed. Tommy vaulted the bakery counter, turning to help Tubbo up and over. Purpled and Ranboo took the more sensible option of heading to the counter door. Tommy and Tubbo didn’t waste a second as they pushed open the heavy metal kitchen door, revealing a sleek space of kitchen appliances and counters that smelled faintly of cinnamon.

It swung open easily, the creak hidden with a crashing sound. A flurry of squawking broke out in the room next door, Jack reaching down and shattering the ice at his feet.

“You’ve gotta be kidding me.” He said, glancing back and his tan skin paled. Purpled coolly met his eyes, one hand catching the kitchen door as Ranboo started to push through. “Look, we could’ve done this easy but now we have to do it fast.”

Agonizing pain glared in his hand and Purpled let out a sound that was most definitely not chirp-like, letting go of the door. His hand was bright red, white in a few tiny patches. Burned, but not badly. There was an answering chirp on the other side of the door. “It’s red fucking hot!” Tommy cursed, his voice raising. Under Purpled’s eyes, the door began to glow cherry red.

He had only seen something like this once before, when some workers were called in to fix a cargo ship that abruptly needed repairs. With blow torches and tools, they had molded the metal after heating it to be red hot.

“Wait just a minute! We can find dish towels or those weird mats- or something! Just wait!” Tubbo yelled. There was the sound of crashing on the other side of the door, the others probably immediately doing something stupid. Despite himself, Purpled felt his mouth quirk up slightly in a grin.

He huffed, slow and deep as he pulled his beloved hoodie sleeve to cover his hand, reaching for the door. There was no other exit, not with the attention of the other’s on the door. Not enough time before Jack reached him to wait for safe materials. He’d just have to take the pain and hope his sleeve slowed it enough that it didn’t cripple him.

He’d fix the sleeve later, but he couldn’t help letting a whine escape as he pushed forward, feeling the heat radiate off the metal. Behind him came a choked off grunt.

“Purpled, don’t touch that.” Purpled stiffened, automatically freezing up out of rage. “Come on, you’re not that dumb. At least, I think you aren’t.”

“Shut up.” He hissed. “You don’t know anything about me.”

Correction. He knew far too much about him. He had let far too much slip out during that stupid time. Far too much the other could use against him for whatever reason.

“I know you don’t have parents at home.” And Purpled flinched hard, rage abruptly faltering. He had never told him that. No one knew. He refused to let the information out, the one thing he refused to sell. “I know they left years ago and only left behind a house and the boat. I know you’ve been alone for a long time.”

He couldn’t help a glance back, seeing Punz easily pinning Jack as the other cursed and struggled. The fight was more brutal than the fights he had seen before, blood beginning to pool on the wooden floor from Punz’s wounds as he pressed Jack’s head to the floor.

“How do you know that?” Purpled said, shaking with rage. He had done everything, erased everything. As far as anyone knew, his parents were aloof and worked off the island. No one connected the dots and he pushed away anyone who got close enough to tell.

Years of never inviting people close to his house, of making excuses, forging paperwork, and faking calls and emails. Years of working because someone had to keep his house running and the money coming in.

Not even the others knew, though he’s pretty sure Ranboo had suspicions.

“I’ve been keeping an eye on you for a while.” Punz said, glancing down at Jack. “Not all of us were only interested after you turned into pups. Some of us were interested before. And look at me, I was right. You were perfect.”

“Perfect.” Purpled repeated coldly. A word he rarely heard. A word most didn’t apply to him.

“Five years ago, you nicked my wallet off of me.” Punz said. “And then sold it back to me. There’s no one else on the island, in all these centuries, that’s fit me like you had. Like the little brother I’ve always wanted.”

“I don’t-“ He didn’t remember stealing Punz’s wallet. He had stolen a lot of wallets over the years. It was a good racket and Purpled finessed it better than most. Instead of taking the money, he’d give it back to the owner in exchange for a reward.

But he had never remembered stealing one off of Punz.

Purpled froze, unable to move. He felt rooted to the spot under those wild blue eyes. He couldn’t recognize them anymore. Has he ever known them at all? What did he know of Punz that weren’t rumors or what he had been told by the other?

Purpled, spymaster and information broker, was completely at a loss.

“I was going to do it better than this. Hire you on for a few contracts and let you get to know me first. We make good partners, I know we do.” Punz said, eyes glancing at the doorway behind him. The screeching was beginning to quiet. “And then I was going to take you on a last job and bring you there.”

Purpled could easily guess where there was.

“You could’ve killed me.” Purpled said, snarling. He knew now he would’ve lived but before? Punz didn’t know. None of them knew. There had been no record of anyone surviving. Punz would’ve known he was taking Purpled to his death and that easily squashed any inconvenient emotions that had started to rise.

“But you didn’t die.” Punz refuted. “And that answered all my questions, when I saw those violet scales off the dock. My little brother lived but I wasn’t the one to bring him and I had to change all my plans. You owe me.”

The door twitched behind him. It was still warm now, he knew and he had been willing before to risk it. But Purpled didn’t make a move towards it.

“I owe you nothing.” Purpled said. But why did he stay frozen to the spot? Why could he move as Punz kicked the weakened Jack to the side, beginning to slowly walk towards him? Where had his strength gone? “I should’ve never let you onto my boat. I should’ve thrown you off of it and into a feeding frenzy miles off of shore.”

“But you didn’t.” Punz said, folding his arms. “Who would you rather go with? The other pods who will treat you as a child and ignore how much you hate it? Or me, who understands you? Who knows and shares your love for money, your mercenary mind, who knows everything about you.”

And despite him-

He was tempted. Really tempted. Fuck.

He hated Punz. He hated his stupid face, his gold chain, his white hoodie that was far too similar to his purple hoodie. He hated how the other went along with him one moment and then treated him like a little kid brother the next.

He hated those sunlit days on the water, pulling up nets. Easy conversation and the occasional hand on his shoulder, pushing the limits Purpled had set. He hated how easily Punz wove himself into his life until Purpled wondered what it would have been like if he had a sibling to keep him company when his parents left. Someone to share the burden. Someone who didn't call him greedy but encouraged his love for money.

He hated him because everything had been ruined on one moonlit night. Because Purpled would never look at him without remembering how easily Punz had pinned him and how he couldn't remember anything but scattered flashes and wants after.

(How he remembered wanting desperately to stay by his side in a scattered flash, childish fear brought to life.)

And maybe, if Punz's plan had worked, he might have considered the profit.

(Who the fuck was he kidding in his own head? He would have joined him. He felt lost enough trying to do this now. Alone and with someone who had wriggled into his life with only a few days and could've done so much in a few months? He would've cracked.)

"You're wrong." He forced himself to say, letting himself fall back into easier habits. A sneer was easier than showing pain. "Because you aren't the only person who understands me."

With that, burning had grabbed his shoulder, yanking him through the door. His last look was Punz's rage before he was forced to turn and face a shadowy figure entering the room, seagulls trailing in their wake.

"What the fuck, you're so heavy." Someone snapped in his ear. Purpled immediately pushed them off of him, glaring at Tommy. The other glared back. "Lucky for you, I'm a big man who doesn't need to worry about stuff like heat."

"You burned your hand, didn't you." Purpled drawled, glancing down. Surprisingly, it didn't look as burned as he expected it to be. "Let's go before they catch up."

"Don't have to tell me twice." Tommy grumbled, weaving through the kitchen. It was smaller than he expected, letting them reach the back door where Tubbo and Ranboo waited with worried looks.

"Are you fine?" Tubbo asked. "We couldn't find anything and then Tommy said he had an idea but you stopped talking."

"I'm fine. Punz talks a lot." Purpled said, shaking his head as he pushed the door open. The wind whipped through the alleyway, tugging at him. But when he glanced towards the opening of the alley way, it was blocked.

By a very familiar figure, Ranboo took a deep breath behind him.

“Funny that we meet here.” Clay said, leaning against the wall. Behind him, a car blocked off the rest of the alley, Clay’s stupid monster of a vehicle. “And perfect timing. We need to talk.”

“Back off.” Ranboo said, his voice shaking slightly. “We’re busy. We got to go.”

“Yeah, I know you are. I’m guessing you’re running away from those weird people.” Clay said, a small smile tilting his face. “Sounds like we can both help each other here. A car and you explain what happened last night.”

Tubbo looked at them and shrugged. Purpled made a stabbing motion. Tommy nodded. Ranboo looked around and Purpled mentally labeled him the alibi. No one would believe Ranboo could commit a murder.

“Fine.” Tubbo agreed. “But if you do anything, you’ll wish they killed you last night.”

Clay shrugged, waving towards the car. Purpled couldn’t help glancing back as he climbed in. He had a good feeling this wasn’t the last time he’d see Punz.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Punz and Purpled are both messed up. And yes, I might write about it later, but Punz’s plan would’ve worked.

No chapter next week! I’ll return the Wednesday after next week, but I have some stuff to work on and a few writing projects to finish.

Love Potion #9

Chapter Notes

There's some gory imagery near the end of the chapter, be careful. Not to one of the boys, but it's describe

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The car, unfairly in Tommy's opinion, was far too big for them. Bunch of rich tossers with a backseat that could fit three teens and a massive gent like himself. What the fuck was up with that? Why not spend it on cooler stuff like unlimited coke?

Granted, Ranboo was half slumped in the floorboards, folded in a way that made Tommy's spine hurt just looking at him. And Tommy and Tubbo had chosen to sit crammed together as Purpled bullied his way into having half of the back seat by himself, spreading out like a resentful amoeba.

"One of you could sit in the front, you know. I'm not sure if you're familiar with cars but that's possible." Clay said, shifting gears. His smug green eyes reflected into the mirror, smug bastard with the smuggest smug. "I don't bite."

"I'm fine." Ranboo said, scrunching in even further. Completely fine. Tommy looked at Tubbo. Should he go up front where he could get a clear shot at the other? Tubbo tilted his head back before slowly shaking his head with a frown.

Not yet.

Tommy scowled, slumping back. That meant they'd be playing this mostly fair which fucking sucked. He didn't want to listen to Clay snidely rant for a whole drive! He could totally hot wire and drive a car!

He huffed, taking a deep breath before coughing slightly. He hated that metallic new car smell. Clay was such a rich ponce. How many cars did he have? Far too many.

Tubbo cleared his throat as the car pulled away from the alley. "Why did you pick us up?" Tubbo said, his voice measured. Tommy threaded his hand into Tubbo's, feeling the other squeeze back.

"I said what I wanted. I want to know what happened last night when one of you threw that asshole at me and then disappeared into midair." Clay said. He scoffed as Tubbo opened his mouth, raising Tommy's hackles. "Don't even try to explain that away. I saw you disappear and Inknow it's real. He gave me a nasty blow."

He took one hand away from the wheel, gesturing at his still bruised face. "He should've punched you harder." Tommy said, glaring. Tubbo jostled him, motioning at the car and then pointing backwards. Tommy shrugged.

"You don't-" Clay cut himself off there. "I just want to know what fucking happened."

"That's not really our story to tell." Tubbo started. Tommy's pocket buzzed, interrupting Tubbo. He glanced down and then away. "But really-" it buzzed again.

Grimacing, Tommy fished the phone out of his pocket, the screen turning on. It was cracked now, a spiderweb stretching across the corner from where he had dropped it. But he kind of regretted it not completely breaking as he glared down at the screen.

Wilbs: WHERE DID YOU GO??

Wilbs: are you okay?

Wilbs: Dad said you ran off

Wilbs: tell me where you are so I can pick you up

Wilbs: Toms don't be like this

"There's some people after us." Tubbo said, interrupting Tommy's justified glaring. "You accidentally got into the middle of it. That's all."

"Some people after you?" Clay said, the corner of his mouth quirking up. "How long are you going to dance around this?"

"I'm not dancing around anything." Tubbo said and he squeezed Tommy's hand hard. Tommy's not surprised to find that he had moved forward slightly, half ready to go for Clay. He forces himself to slump back, grumbling slightly.

It wasn't fair! They had worked so hard to stay hidden and make sure nobody knew but nooooo. Of course it had to be fucking Clay who found out. The absolute ponce. How had he even survived last night?

Purpled and Tommy shared glances, for once on the same wavelength. Until Tubbo pushed between them, glaring back.

'I'm not hiding a body right now.' He mouths. Tommy scowls. He could totally hide a body by himself! He didn't need Tubbo to do it for him!

"Why don't we play a game? I've played this one before with my friends so you'll probably like it." Clay said, his fingers tapping at the wheel. "I want answers and you probably have some kind of questions for me. For every question, you have to answer with the truth. If you lie, the other can lie once."

"That's a stupid game." Tommy said. How did that even count as a game? It was just answering questions. But his next words caught in his throat as bright green eyes met his in

the mirror. He couldn't seem to breathe until Clay looked away, forcing himself to glance down at the phone in his other hand.

Once a bully, always a bully.

He scowled again when he saw yet another text from Wilbur. Why the fuck hadn't he blocked the guy? Oh yeah, because he forgot the other had given him his number.

Wilbs: Toooooomsssss where are you? :(I'm good! Reformed! I'm not gonna try to eat your friends again

That bitch was 0 for 2 and he knew it. Tommy glared even harder at his phone but unfortunately, he didn't develop the power to light Wilbur on fire with his mind. Not yet at least.

"How will you know when we lie?" Purpled said, skepticism dripping off of his words. "How would you know if we lie?"

"I know." Clay said. "As for you, you'll just have to guess with your own ability. It's no fun if it's not a game."

Still was a rather stupid game.

"That's your first question though so I'll start then." Clay chirped. He glossed right over Purpled's snarl and Tubbo's attempted explanation. "What are you actually running from?"

"Cannibalistic mermaids." Ranboo said with a hysterical sort of snort. Tommy nudges him with his foot, getting a sound like a dying balloon. "It sounds even more insane if you say it out loud."

"If you keep chanting it, the words lose all meaning." Tubbo whispered to him. Tommy nodded. He had seen Tubbo practicing. It did work. Tubbo cleared his throat. "Yeah, that's our answer."

"Hm." Clay said, turning onto the next street. Tommy stared outside, blearily trying to remember where the fuck they were. It was hard enough telling all the kooky streets apart with their cookie cutter houses before not getting enough sleep. "So, why the cannibalistic mermaids?"

"We have something they want." And surprisingly, it's Purpled who laughs at that one. Not much, that fucker won't break for anything. But a small little huff from the window. He fucking knew it, that bitch hadn't had their sense of humor surgically removed!

But yeah, fucking hello. Tommy stared at Tubbo who has the grace to look a little sheepish. That was a light way to put that they were a bunch of kidnapping bastards.

"Seems way more serious than that to me. That guy nearly tore one of my friends apart." Clay said. Well, clearly, he didn't. Tommy scoffed.

“Wimp. Whining about an attempted murder.” He said, rolling his eyes. Clay made a strange wheezing sound. Another buzz from his pocket distracted him from the sound, forcing him to look down.

Wilbs: Techno wants ahidfjnsjdiffo

Wilbs: Back here.

Wilbs: Now.

Tommy brings up the number page, finger hovering over the block button. But he couldn't click it. Even as he scowled and tried to get his arm to move, it wouldn't. He could almost hear the sad croon in his head.

It was stupid. It is stupid! Wilbur tried to kills Big T and Ranboo! And here Tommy is, hesitating over blocking him! Why couldn't he do it? He had blocked people for way less before?

Tubbo squeezed his hand hard, eyes dark with concern. Tommy shrugged, flicking the contacts page away. He'd get it done eventually. Stupid fish brain couldn't stop him forever.

“That's two questions for us.” Tubbo said, narrowing his eyes. He must be in serious mode right now. “What were you doing at the alley way?”

“I was actually going to swing by the restaurant. When I saw your bag, it gave me a craving for some of their food.” Clay said. Tommy rolled his eyes. Weird flex but fuck off, whatever. Of course a rich bastard ate fancy sushi. “I heard some sort of commotion from that street and stopped so I could see what was going on.”

“That's a weird route to take.” Ranboo said. Tommy nudged him again. “I mean, like with the going around back and everything. It's not exactly a fast route.”

“I was dropping off Adam.” Clay said flippantly. “That is the fastest route from his route.”

Ranboo didn't speak up again, looking like he would rather melt into the floorboards. Tommy nudged him, making a motion like punching someone. If Clay tried something, anything, that fucker was dead.

Tommy could set things on fire with his mind now! Who gave a fuck about a bully!

Okay, so maybe the fire setting needed to wait for a bit because fuck, he was drained. Now, when he reached for the fire, it almost seemed to twist away from him and that made something deep in his chest feel kind of panicky and bad. Because the fish part did not want to think about how his main source of protection was obeying him right now.

Look. It was fine. Whatever. Tommy was still plenty dangerous without the ability to set things on fire with his mind! Case in point, he was going to fucking murder Clay if necessary and it felt very necessary to him.

His phone buzzed again and this time, Tommy tried to ignore it, turning to website browsing online. Lots of good stuff. Tons of celebrity drama. There was always celebrity drama online.

“How did you survive last night?” Tubbo said and that dragged his attention away from whatever drama was going on on the rabid news site. But it was a question that Tommy was kind of curious too.

Clay looked like he packed a nasty punch but he had seen Dream last night. That fucked had sprinted away, carrying Tubbo without a hitch. And Tommy had Tubbo call on top of him! For someone so fucking small, he was really fucking heavy!

As if he could sense what he was thinking, Tubbo elbowed him in the ribs.

“I think he was distracted.” Clay said and he could see an attempt at a shrug. Pathetic. “When he was doing it, his attention wasn’t on the people he was attacking. He was focused on you. He was furious after you disappeared.”

Teleported, he was pretty sure that’s how Ranboo had put it. Damn, Tommy was almost sort of jealous of that. “Do you think if I shank him, I will learn how to teleport?” He whispered to Tubbo.

“We can investigate later.” Tubbo whispered back. Because he was a fantastic friend like that. Besides, Tommy really wanted to know how to teleport. Like, yesterday.

He wanted off this island. Ranboo and Purpled and maybe Clem, Fundy, and Sally were the only good parts on it. After that, it was just a bunch of bitches showing up and ruining his life. How was he supposed to balance his many hot wives with these guys chasing him?

He clicked off of the new site, checking the rest of the internet. Another text message. This one made the hair on the back of his neck stand up, just a little bit.

Wilbs: I know where you sleep.

Wilbs: I found the tracks..

That was fucking creepy. Who the fuck texted that to someone?

“My turn.” Clay said. “Why do you hate those guys so much?”

“What?” Ranboo yelped. Tommy turned and tried to bore a hole through the seat.

“What the fuck kind of question is that?” He said, his voice dripping acid and his hands balled into fists, accidentally squeezing Tubbo’s hand before he stopped. “Why the fuck would we like them? They’re just a bunch of bitches who are doing fucking wrongun things.”

“They’re trying to kidnap us.” Tubbo said, his tone of voice sharp. Clay made another little half shrug.

“Hey, don’t shoot the messenger! I figured I’d ask in case this was some kind of game to you or something.” Clay said smoothly. “I don’t want to get fucked up because of a game. I’ve seen what can happen.”

Tommy rolled his eyes. He wished this was just a game. That would make things so much easier if this entire thing was fake and the mer didn't actually want them.

(Or if they were okay with the mer taking them. That too.)

His phone buzzed again in his grip and it took everything he had not to pitch it out the window. "Someone bugging you? Your phone keeps going off." Clay said, sounding annoyed. As if his phone didn't interrupt class all the time, the hypocritical bitch.

"It's all my hot girlfriends." Tommy said and he did not deserve that raised eyebrow from Purpled. But if got another strange wheezing sound from Clay. Surprise? Or rudeness? He would bet on the latter.

"Look, it's not a game, we're not agreeing to this, and right now, we just want to go home and sleep. So, curb it." Tubbo said, leaning more into Tommy. He huffed, shifting his arm so it was around his shoulder. Clingy bitch. "Why are you giving us a ride anyways?"

"Because it'll make them mad." Clay said, shifting the wheel to weave around some tourists who stepped into the narrow road. "Because it's funny to see them mad. Pick either, it works."

"He's taking the bruise personally." Purpled said under his breath with an eye roll. As if he wasn't the king of taking things personally and carefully building his little grudges. Tommy had never thought he would meet someone worse than Tubbo.

"That's just how Clay is." Ranboo whispered, a bitter twist to his lips that spoke of years of experience. Oh look! Murderous intent was back! Definitely better than listening to the whiny fish in his head.

Phone buzz. He was going to fucking kill Someone. Probably Clay. Probably Wilbur if he saw that hipster again. But somebody!

He tried to ignore it, thumbing to a new contact in his messages. Fundy had put it in this morning, half asleep in the back of the car with a reminder to text them if anything happened. It took three tries before he got the right number in, but it worked!

Tommy had promptly ignored every other instruction but he felt like he couldn't be blamed for that. Some people were just built different, absolutely pog, and just not like the rest. Ergo, he could not be held to the same rules as others. Also, he was kind of buzzy.

Another buzz, and he didn't even have to look to know that it was another half hidden request/threat to return that made the fish part of his brain cringe back. It was getting harder and harder to ignore the urge to reply to these.

Instead, he forced himself to type out a message to Fundy.

Big man: whats the word on the cure

Big man: dont ignore me

Big man: did you find something yet

Big man: nearly got yoinked earlier bunch of wrongsuns

“My turn now.” Clay said, making Tommy roll his eyes at the dramatic effect in the other’s voice. “Why were you at the restaurant?”

“Someone sent us some food and we thought we’d follow up with the who.” Purpled said before Tubbo could answer. “This entire game is stupid, can we stop playing now?”

‘Headache.’ Ranboo mouthed to them and Tommy could see Purpled’s skin had gone pale. The other was leaning against the window, pressing his head to the slightly cooler glass, head craned to catch the breeze from the AC. Just do not pog. He frowned, shifting back and trying to give the other just a little bit more space.

“Fine then. I can be quiet.” Clay said, his voice strangely quiet. The sound of his phone vibrating is strangely loud in the car and Purpled hissed. Tommy felt his cheeks warm, glaring as he flicked the message open savagely.

It didn’t come from who he expected.

Furry: ARE YOU AT NORTH BEACH

Furry: WHAT THE FUCK HAPPENED

Furry: I’m on my way

Furry: Try to stay near the police

Big man: what the fuck are you talking about

Fundy said a link. Tommy opened it, waiting impatiently for it to load. It took him to a little local news site. The small kind, the one that usually reported who won bingo or something because this island was too small to have much.

At least, he assumed. Maybe the cannibal mermaids were good for business. He didn’t fucking judge.

And then he froze as the pictures loaded, stomach lurching and acid rising in his mouth.

Local teens found dead at North Beach after tropical storm! The headline screened. There were photos of people standing around in the surf and sand.

Sand that was near their foster home. He could see the path where Tubbo had been dragged away, the stretch of sand where they sat and talked about what was going on. Where Wilbur and Techno followed them.

Now marred by ugly black bags and cars. A bunch of people standing around and talking into walk-in talkies.

Distantly, he can hear Tubbo talking to Clay. But he couldn’t focus on the words, scrolling down quickly. It said teens so he knew it couldn’t be Clem who was old as all get out.

But part of him was strangely terrified. Clem had been nice, nice enough at least. He didn’t want to know that they got ripped apart.

His stomach lurched again and Tommy had to take some real deep fucking breaths. Clay would most definitely make him pay a fortune if he threw up in his car and big men didn't throw up because of photos. The teasing? He'd pass.

But it was gruesome, the sight of body parts scattered across the sand, blood dying the pale sand red in patches. There was no matching one to the other, it was thrown all over the sand.

Like there was no care. No concern. Something had ripped these guys apart. But what the fuck could do that?

Techno, he thought, remembering the mako shark. Maybe Sam, the guy who had carried him, he had felt strong. Maybe not Schlatt, but probably someone who worked with him. Politicians always had someone who could break a few knees.

And then he scrolls down a little further and his heart drops into a pit. He hears Tubbo make a slight pained sound, knows he's holding too tight but he can't stop.

He recognized that shirt.

It was bloody and torn, half shredded and attached to what looked like red pulp at this point. But he knew that shirt. Even if he had only ever seen it at a stupid dare gone wrong.

Clay wore that shirt. To the island.

Slowly, Tommy looked up, meeting poisonous green eyes in the mirror.

"Is something wrong?"

Chapter End Notes

I love this cliffhanger

Dr. Danger

Chapter Notes

The boys are really going through it now.

Trigger warning: One of the boys is hurt on accident during an escape attempt.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The words choked in his throat.

Like a fucking, he didn't fucking know. Freeze instinct? What the fuck was it called when deer froze in front of a car? The fish part of his brain was desperately trying to lock him in place, convinced there was a predator nearby and if he made noise, He Was Going To Be Eaten.

But he wasn't- couldn't let this fucker keep driving them. Where the fuck would he take them?

So instead, Tommy kicked the back of his seat. Hard. He put every inch of his muscles in it, Clay- no, Dream. Maybe? He wasn't fucking sure but it was the only fucker of that pod who hadn't shown his goddamn face.

Clay made a strange yelping noise, the car jerking to a stop and Ranboo squeaked as Purpled let out a soft curse, head pillowed in his hands. Tommy kicked again, jerking the seat forward and wishing he had his knife.

"Fuck." Dream snapped. All the friendly humor had drained out of his eyes when he looked up from the wheel if it was ever there in the first place. "Not when I'm driving! I could have crashed!"

"Fuck you." Tommy snapped, fumbling for his seat belt.

"Tommy, what the fuck?" Tubbo hissed, eyes wide and confused. Tommy choked as the eye contact was broken, pressing his phone into Tubbo's hands. Fuck. His throat felt raspier than the time that he drank an entire bottle of lemon juice on a dare.

He sees the moment where Tubbo gets it, staring at the photo. The flash of horror as his eyes widened at the gore before narrowing again. "Andy, not Adam." He said, slowly looking up again. "The kid at school, that guy was called Andy. But you dropped off Adam."

There was an audible click, Tommy eyes shooting towards the doors. Before he could try them, Ranboo practically flopped on top of him in his rush to tug at them. The door handle jerked but nothing happened.

“Did you just fucking child lock us?” Tommy said incredulously. No one had child locked him into a car in years! Not till he made a point to his social worker by fritzing the lock in their car which was very cool and definitely on purpose.

“It seems like a good idea.” Dream said, pulling the car into gear. He was far too casual as he continued. “I mean, this is a nice car. And well, it is fitting? Papa used to child lock me in the car all the time. It’s way more annoying at eight hundred so I don’t see what you’re complaining about.”

“Bold of you to lock us into a car with you.” Purpled said. He slowly raised his head, violet eyes burning with a murderous fury. Mood.

Tommy lunged over the seat, hands going for Dream’s throat.

And then his wrist erupted in pain.

“Fuck!” Tommy snarled as Dream grabbed his wrist with one hand, not even looking up from the road. He could feel the bones grind together agonizingly as the fragile bones bent to their limit.

“Let go of him!” Tubbo shrieked, warm hands wrapped around Tommy’s elbow and pulling his arm back. Dream let go, Tommy falling back into his seat as he cradled his wrist. The skin was already beginning to darken as Tubbo pulled his sleeve back. “Fuck.”

“He hadn’t grabbed that tight.” Tommy said, his eyes widening in involuntary shock. The grip had felt light but it felt like agony. How strong was this fucker?

“I thought you guys said you wouldn’t hurt us.” Ranboo said, tugging on his tie so hard that the fabric began to fray. Purpled reached out, beginning to tug the other up into the seats, away from the crazy fucking bastard.

“Shit. Grabbed too hard. He could have hurt himself far worse making me crash but that was a bit much, I’ll admit that.” Dream said. “Playing games while driving isn’t allowed till you’re older.”

Tommy couldn’t move his eyes away from his wrist. Distantly, he could hear the fish part of his brain screaming in the back of his head, bringing back bad memories. Fuck, it hurt.

“You’re sick.” Tubbo spat. He cradled Tommy’s wrist, face dropping as he winced. “Are you okay?”

“Never better. As if that bitch could hurt a big man like me.” Tommy spat. Tubbo raised his eyebrow, obviously not believing him. Couldn’t get anything past him. He grit his teeth, pulling his arm away and feeling it protest every movement. Not broken, he could tell the difference. But it hurt like a bitch.

“Once we get back, Bad can give you a potion for your wrist.” Dream said, his voice dropping into something that mocked soothing comfort. “It’ll fix those bruises right up and after a nap, you’ll be good as new.”

“Why would we go anywhere with you?” Tubbo spat. Tommy glared at the back of the seat, kicking it again. But like an unfair wrongun bitch, Dream didn’t flinch this time. “You nearly broke his wrist! You kidnapped us!”

“I wasn’t going to break his wrist.” Dream said, shaking his head like he was disappointed. “Look, I’m sorry. I grabbed too hard. I’m used to the games my friends play and pups are more fragile than I’m used to.”

“Why the fuck should we go with you then!” Tubbo shrieked, his voice jumping an octave. Tommy reached out, grabbing his hand. They didn’t need panicking Tubbo right now. He needed the Tubbo that would spite build a bomb.

“I’ll do better.” Dream promised. “I- look, I really am sorry. I’ve never gotten to meet a pup before and I heard how delicate you were but I never got to see.”

“I’m not delicate.” Tommy spat. He had never once been delicate in his life. No one had ever described him as delicate. The very word was anathema. Hurricane Tommy, ready to destroy the wronguns of the world.

“Don’t.” Tubbo whispered, eyes wide when Tommy turned to him. “Tommy just, in a bit but not now. He’s gonna hurt you. I can’t-“

“He deserves it!”

“Please don’t. I’ll plan.” Tubbo said. And Tommy forced himself to sit back, gritting his teeth at the thought.

“They really were right when they said abandoned pups take on any role.” Dream said. He ignored Tommy’s spluttering to continue. “You bruise easier now. Tire quicker. Soreness and strain are more noticeable.” Ranboo flinched. “Loud sounds and bright lights give you migraines.” Purpled snarled. “Would you have bruised before?”

No. But that didn’t mean this fucker should get away with it. Tommy kicked the back seat again. “You still fucking hurt me.”

And then Dream made this little whistle click sound and in a blink, Tommy felt himself slump back into the seat, anger draining away. It came back in a moment but that didn’t get rid of the impression as he slowly pushed himself up.

It was like all of his anger just- vanished.

“What was that?” Purpled said, one hand reaching to check Tommy’s eyes. Tommy slapped his hand away with a hiss, making Purpled roll his eyes. Fuck that.

“That was the calming instinct coming in. Awesome, that makes this game easier.” Dream said. He tapped his fingers on the wheel. “I did not expect that to work just yet but it’s good that you’re finally listening.”

Tommy glared, not understanding. But Tubbo did because he cursed, reaching up and grabbed Tommy by the shoulder. “It’s getting worse.” He said, his eyes wide and nervous as

he looked at Tommy. “The fish- mer, whatever, they get stronger don’t they? The effects on us.”

His hands said something different, letters tracing across Tommy’s skin. A trick he knew well but something that Tubbo rarely resorted to.

Distract him.

Tommy felt for his pockets. The phone was in Ranboo’s hands, the other slumping even further into the crevice between the seats and proving that he had no spine at all. Otherwise, he would have snapped it like a twig. Must be the eclair bone life.

But he could feel tubes of paint and the thought made him grin. It wasn’t firecrackers, but paint could be better. It wasn’t a knife but he never left home without them.

(Okay, well, he did but Fundy was a crafty bitch who was exactly the type of guy who kept paint in east to steal spots. But he couldn’t say that because Purpled was a crafty bitch in a different way who’d argue that stealing knives was a better idea and Why Did He Not Steal Knives and nyeh nyeh nyeh.

If Fundy didn’t want it stolen, he should have replaced it with knives.)

“If you were a born mer, you would have had them from the moment you were born.” Dream said with a soft wheezing sound that Tommy hated because now he knew that bitch was laughing at them. It was only the reminder of pain- nope, it was only his magnum outs personality that had him granting mercy to a wrongun like Dream. Nothing more than that. “But as far as the stories tell it, turned get them slower. Safety precaution, in case some filthy human snags a pup before they can find a protector.”

As if he was going to listen to some kind of fish in his head. Tommy wasn’t some wimp who’d lose to a fish in a brain fight! He was a big man who ruled his brain with an iron fish.

“Protector.” Purpled drawled the word out with revulsion. “You keep saying that. I don’t think it means what you think it means.”

“Sure it does. Protectors protect the pod and nest. In some cases, that means bringing the occasional wayward mer back. All part of the job.” Dream said, sickeningly casual as he turned the wheel, taking them down a side road.

“Like you are.” Tubbo said. Tommy pressed a tube of paint into his waiting hand. “I don’t recognize this route. You were never going to take us home and you banked on us being too tired to notice.”

“I honestly thought you’d fall asleep during the drive. You don’t look so good.” Dream said, glancing in the mirror. Tommy stuck his tongue out. “You still can. It’ll be better for you if you sleep through this. What are you running on, four hours? Three? I know when you went back to that house last night.”

“Creepy. You a stalker?” Tommy spat. “Wrongun following teenagers back to their houses?”

“Sam told me. I was busy. With a distraction one of you organized.” Ranboo made a choking little hiccuping sound, drawing Tommy’s eyes. Right, that dumb bitch still had morals.

He didn’t hate Clay. He didn’t really like him but Tommy had met bullies before and he would have gladly gone for the throat if Clay had hurt Tubbo. As it was, he didn’t have time to worry about his death and how that was a pretty fucking terrible way to go. That could be reserved for way fucking later when he needed to pull Tubbo out of a panic spiral about the what could have beens.

(If one of them had really been human..)

He nudged his foot hard against Ranboo’s hip, eyes meeting dark sunglasses. “Not your fault.” He said. “Dream killed him. Not you.”

“But why?” Ranboo whispered. “I thought- I wanted it to just be a distraction. I didn’t plan for-“

“Last night. When we got separated, the guy who grabbed me met Dream and I saw Clay down the street and yelled at him to get his attention. And he got mad and yelled at Dream and then when the guy who grabbed me did the freaky teleporting thing, I grabbed Tubbo and left him alone with them.”

As Ranboo hid his face, certain that they would reject him.

Tommy was really bad with checkers but he was pretty sure pelting your opponent with pawns was a legal move. After all, Tubbo had done it first. “Shut your brain up.”

“You’re so bad at comfort.” Ranboo whispered back. Tommy softly kicked him again. Bitch. He was the best at comforting people.

“I would have killed them anyways.” Dream said and Ranboo made a weird shuddery click chirp and Tommy clamped his hand over his mouth before he could chirp back. From the rancid look on Purpled’s face, he was doing the same. “They scared you. They lost the game. And they died. That’s all there really was to it.”

“It’s murder.” Ranboo replied. Dream wheezed.

“It’s natural selection.” He shrugged. “What’s the human saying, play stupid games and win stupid prizes? I did them a favor practically. Your friend Techno would have done far worse.”

“He’s not our friend.” Tommy spat. None of the mer were their friends. They were just a bunch of dumb stupid bitches who harassed them all the time. They weren’t friends at all.

“Good.” Dream said. “Sure you don’t want that nap?”

“No!”

He wasn’t going to sleep, no matter how exhaustion dragged at his eyes. Big men didn’t sleep! Big men like him just said no to sleep for they had far better things like texting their hot girlfriends.

“You set it up.” Tubbo said, his breathing beginning to slow again. That was good because it meant his dumb brain wasn’t being dumb and hurting him anymore. “They said you wore a mask so there was no way we’d know your face.”

“A rather neat ability of mine, disguise is.” Dream said. There was something feral to the edge of his smile. Like those lions he saw in documentaries, waiting for prey. “Maybe I’ll show you how it works someday. That guy Andy or Adam or whatever told me everything I needed to know in exchange for living. At least for a bit longer.”

Oh, that guy was definitely dead. Shivved, kicked the bucket, got in a fist fight with a mako. Rest in pieces Andy.

“And then you made that guy chase us through the restaurant.” Purpled said, his voice dripping in revulsion. Tommy kicked the back of the seat again, getting an annoyed hiss from Dream. He thought those bitches were more incompetent than normal! He just assumed Jack was a moron and it was infectious. “All he needed to do was push us towards the back door and we’d take your offer.”

“That was George’s idea, he’s done it in manhunts before.” Dream said, baring sharp teeth. Tommy squeezed the tube of paint so hard that it nearly popped in his hand. “If it didn’t work, I would have just ambushed you in school tomorrow.”

“But our classmates-“

“So?” Dream said. “More fun. Bigger games always make for more fun. It’s not like we can’t handle a few humans.”

And by handle, he was pretty sure Dream meant ‘horrifically maul’. Tommy’s stomach definitely did not lurch when he remembered those photos.

Tubbo squeezed his hands. Quickly, he traced a message on his palm.

Now?

A moment later came the answer.

Now.

He didn’t know much about the actual plan but he didn’t need a plan for this. The myriad use of paint had long been opened for him.

He was going to make this bitch wish that he had never even heard of him. Crush his dreams and soul until there was nothing but a sniveling husk left of him.

Tommy lunged but this time, he wasn’t going for Dream’s throat. Dream cursed, pulling back from the wheel as he reached up and Tommy whipped the cap open, smearing the paint in Dream’s eyes. Tubbo threw his forward, spraying the inside of the windshield.

Dream howled in pain and shock, the car jerking to a stop as he slammed his foot down, hands reaching for his eyes.

“Bet that fucking hurts!” Tommy jeered triumphantly. Take that!

“Go! Open the door!” Tubbo screamed. Tommy gave up on the door handle instantly, twisting in the seat so he could slam his shoe against the windshield. Once, twice, Dream hissed, streaking blue covering his eyes as he began to reach into the backseat blindly.

“Stop!” And Tommy felt Tubbo’s hands clamp over his ears, only hearing the beginning of a hiss that made Tubbo’s hands shake as he covered his ears. Purpled reached up, swatting at Dream’s hands and trying to grapple away.

“Fuck!” Dream said faintly, reaching up and clawing the paint away with his free hand. Tommy slammed his shoes against the window again.

Once.

Twice.

On the third he was rewarded with the sharp crack of glass as it shattered under his foot. Tommy whooped in excitement. “I’ve fucking got it!” He yelled. He shoved his hand through the open hole, trying to avoid the jagged glass as he grabbed the handle from the other side.

No sound had ever satisfied him more than the click of the door handle. He knew his girlfriends would weep if they knew the answering chime of their texts had now fallen flat, buried under the glory that was his escape.

“Stop!” Dream yelled, faint through the hands covering his ears. His eyes were red as they blinked open, his irises strangely serpentine. “Don’t you dare, pup.”

“Oh, I fucking dare.” Tommy said, kicking the door the rest of the way open. Fuck seatbelts! He knew they were traps which was why he didn’t wear them and he was now totally justified in this thought and Tubbo was in the wrong for side-eying him earlier. “You fucking failed bitch! You get an F for kidnapping!”

“Stop yelling and go!” Purpled said, shoving Dream back.

Tubbo shoved him through the open door because the bitch was a self sacrificial martyr. Tommy turned instantly, reaching through the door to grab Tubbo and pull him out.

A grip like steel caught his shoulder, pulling him back. A green boot flickered past in his vision, kicking the door shut again. Through the shattered glass, he could see Tubbo’s eyes widen with horror.

“You shouldn’t be out here.” And Tommy recognized that bitchy voice. He twisted in their grip but that bitch had to be eating rocks or something but he didn’t budge an inch. “We have to stop meeting like this.”

“Stop trying to fucking kidnap me then.” Tommy said, his voice rising to a shriek as he began to thrash and kick. “Some would say this is really un Pog of you and very much a bitch and wrongun thing to do.”

And Sam, the bitch that he was, just sighed. Sighed. Like Tommy was some kind of misbehaving little child. “Don’t even think of opening the door.” He said, kicking it shut before Tubbo could get it open again. Tubbo’s eyes promised murder. “I would prefer not to but if you can’t travel together, I’ll be taking Tommy to the pier on my own.”

“You can’t fucking do that! This is kidnapping! Teenager stealing!” Tommy howled. He tried to twist and bite Sam’s hands, gnawing at the man’s stupid gloves.

“I can and I will.” Sam said firmly. “Are you going to stay there?”

Ranboo, Purpled, and Tubbo exchanged looks. Tommy tried to muscle in on the group think, glaring at them to get the fuck out of there. He could definitely beat Sam in a fight. The door was unlocked, Sam had his hands full, and Dream was still half blind. It was easy fucking pickings.

They needed to go.

But slowly, Tubbo turned back from the chat, shaking his head. “Tubbo, you dumb bitch, just go!” Tommy yelled. And Tubbo’s sad eyes met his.

“We’ll behave.” He said, sitting back into his seat. Purpled glared for a moment longer and Tommy was certain the other knew what was up. That he’d do the rational thing and leave. Instead, the other met his eyes before flickering his away, leaning back against the window and closing his eyes.

Ranboo- okay, Tommy had had no hopes for Ranboo. The other had scrunched so far into the floor space that he had practically disappeared.

“There we go.” Sam said with a sigh. Tommy yelped as he was lifted off the ground, and for the second time in two days, carried across the ground. But not towards the door. Away. Tommy snapped at his hand again, trying to jerk free. “Careful, I don’t want to drop you here.”

“You said that you wouldn’t leave!” Tubbo yelled, kicking the back of Dream’s seat. The other hissed, wiping away more paint from his eyes.

“I’m not.” Sam said soothingly. “But right now, you’ve lost back seat privileges. I know it’s stressful but I will not have any escapees and so you’re getting separated. Consider this a warning.”

Grudgingly, Tommy had to be impressed how Sam juggled him to one hand, pulling the door open with the other. But being impressed didn’t stop him from trying to go for Sam’s throat. A broad hand pushed his head away as Sam climbed inside and like the loser he was, buckled his seatbelt.

“Finally.” Dream said. “Thought I had you following us for nothing.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy spat. It was horrendous how easily Sam kept him pinned, the door clicking shut. Worst sound in the world. Officially at the bottom of the list.

“Says the man who’s covered in paint.” Sam said. His eyes flickered to the back. “Bad would murder you if he knew that you were driving like this. Didn’t you get your license two decades ago? You’re not even wearing a seatbelt.”

“Bitch!”

Dream glossed over him like he hadn’t even said anything. “Says the one who wasn’t wrangling four pups in a car.” Dream said with a snort. “I can’t wait to teach them manhunt, they’re gonna make it fun.”

“No manhunt for three centuries.”

“I was playing manhunt at two, it will be fine.”

“I’m pretty sure that just meant Sapnap and George chasing you around a cave.” Sam countered. “They’re not leaving the cave.”

“I do what I want, bitch!” Tommy snapped. A broad hand pushed him away again. Tommy peered into the backseat, looking at Tubbo’s wide and afraid eyes.

What’s the plan, he tried to signal. There had to be some kind of plan. Tommy was not getting dragged to the pier by a bunch of bitches. He had a schedule! Coke to drink! Games to be played! Hot girlfriends to text!

At the very least, they could go. The car was moving, but not fast enough that someone couldn’t jump out, Tommy knew by experience. Even Ranboo could probably do it.

Slowly, Tubbo shook his head. Nothing. Tommy waved at the window. Stubbornly, Tubbo shook his head. Tommy reached out, trying to swat Ranboo into moving but Sam pulled his hand back. “No fighting in the car.” He said. “What I wouldn’t give for a tide pool.”

“I will end you.” Tommy hissed. He hated tide pools! The fish in the back of his head chirped hopefully, liking the thought of an enclosed nest with hiding spots big enough for four and that made him shake his head harder.

“Sure you will.” Sam said indulgently. He shifted upright in his seat. “Here we go.”

Drama wheezed as the car jerked forward, matching with muffled cursing outside. “Dream, you bitch! Don’t try to run me over!”

Tommy shifted up slightly too, eyes widening as he took in glittering blue. Dream parked right on the very edge on the dock. And outside were some annoyingly familiar figures. These bitches again.

Punz stepped up to the car door and Tommy had never seen Purpled moved so fast, the other climbing over Tubbo in his haste to get away from the door. Sapnap broke into peaks of laughter. “Someone’s going through a tantrum.” He said.

“Don’t let them out yet.” George said, staring up the beach. “We have bigger things to deal with.”

“Perfect, I need to blow off steam.” Dream said. “Be good!”

Tommy went cross eyed, too shocked to bite as this motherfucker *booped his nose*.

How dare he.

Dream was dead. He was going to kill him. People would wonder for centuries on how dead this guy would be. The eighth wonder of the world.

Sam sighed. “We’ll have to do this again later.” He said and before Tommy could say anything, he was lifted up and shoved back into the back seat. He collapsed on top of Ranboo, making the other yelp in surprise as his space was suddenly invaded.

Ahead, he could hear the clicking of the door. And the slamming of another, Purpled letting out some choice swears as Tommy fought to untangle himself from Ranboo.

And then the car lurched.

“What are they doing?” Ranboo said as the car groaned and very unhelpfully holding onto Tommy.

“Are you kidding-“ Tubbo blinked down at the mess that was Tommy and Ranboo. “They’re going to shove the car into the water and trap us there.”

“The window!” Tommy said, trying to scramble up and cover up. His eyes flicked down. “Freeze it!”

“I-“ Ranboo’s hands came up but the car lurched and groaned before falling forward. There was a muffled crash.

And then the water started to pour in.

This was such a bitch of a day, -10/10, Tommy thought as a warm itching sensation swept over his skin.

Chapter End Notes

Yeah, Clay’s parents are not getting this reimbursed by insurance.

Instant pup cage, just add water!

(And yes, Dream did not mean to hurt Tommy. He’s used to swatting away Sapnap who thinks fighting electric eels is fun and George who could get hit by a boulder and sleep through it. But that does not make it okay and Dream is not being a good guy even if he apologizes. Remember, if someone hurts you, even if they apologize, it doesn’t make it okay. This is a dark fic and this would be very not okay in real life.)

A Twist in the Tail

Chapter Notes

I'm back! Feeling much better too! Being sick sucks. Thank you everyone for all of your kind comments and well wishes! It was really sweet to read when I was sick and feeling unhappy.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It's the warmth Tubbo feels first.

On nearly forgotten instinct, he takes a breath of air before the car sinks below the surface. There's a strange horror in feeling an instant urge to release when before there was a desperate need to hold.

In the movies, the water rises around the car, slowed by closed windows and doors. In most movies, they didn't break a window. Or, Tubbo thought wryly, that was usually the goal after the car had sank. They skipped a step. And the ocean came in anyways.

It's less itchy now and yet, it still feels strangely painful in a way that doesn't feel weird. He feels more than sees how the scales sweep over his skin, the strange bubbling feeling of fins developing. As his panicked kicking changes as legs disappear.

It's the first time he's been conscious to realize this, Tubbo thought hysterically. They should have practiced because haha, he did not like this. This was abysmal.

The space around him becomes a lot more crowded and a lot more colorful. Distantly, he feels Tommy topple into the back seat, shreds of leather drifting through the water as the torn seat cover disintegrating.

And then abruptly, all the panic falls away to peace.

Someone chirps. Scales press against his and distantly, he knows he's flopped over someone. An arm is thrown over his back and someone trills- no, he trills.

Safety, something in the back of his mind coos. Safety. Hatch mates are here and close and safe. Nothing can get at them here. No shark or predator could fit into their little spot and he sinks just a bit deeper into it. How long has it been since he's felt safe?

Tubbo's eyes droop as he curls into the pillow and he hears someone yawn, more gurgling than normal. Safe spot. They could sleep here. No one could get to them. He didn't have to defend the spot.

Distantly, he could feel part of his grow nervous but it's swept away in waves of tiredness and contentment. What else did he need? He was tired. There was a place to sleep here. His hatch mates were here. They were safe. What else? He shuffles sleepily, burrowing a bit deeper into the pile.

When he's on the very edge of toppling over, he hears it. Rising and falling next to his ear.

"-no,no, please let me out nonotubbopurpled Tommy get up I need out it's too much this isn't funny man-"

Sleepily, Tubbo head butts them. Why were they talking? What was wrong? Why were they panicking? He didn't see anything to panic about. He knew there was nothing threatening nearby.

"Tubbo, please." There was a shrill undertone to it, a panicked chirp. Some bit of Tubbo claws more mental ground back, looking into panicked red and green eyes. Blinking felt like trying to lift up the world.

Ranboo?

What could Ranboo be afraid of? There was nothing around them but the nest structure, hatchmates, and water-

Wait.

It feels like clawing up through molasses. No, through a wave pool (because Tubbo never got to actually swim in the goddamn ocean like a normal human person before this so this metaphor sucked). The surface trying to push him down but Tubbo shoved it away, focusing on the need to help the other.

"You're not wearing your glasses." He mumbled. That felt strangely important. The other didn't say anything, heterochromatic eyes fixed on him.

"Ranboo?" He said. His eyes went wider, the climb becoming a little easier. Realization finally kicks in, synapses finally getting together to do some work. "You're afraid of water."

Ranboo doesn't even nod, looking frozen in place. His eyes wide and terrified. His claws had sunken deep into the seat next to him, water rippling around him as he shook.

He didn't notice before because he was pinning him by laying on him, Tubbo thought with a sinking feeling in his stomach. Instantly, he reared up, accidentally slamming back into the weight pushing him down, flailing as he did.

There was a sharp hiss behind him, his elbow slamming home in someone's stomach. Tubbo hissed back. How could they be sleeping at a time like this-

Like Tubbo was.

The thought was strangely dizzying. Just a moment ago, not even a minute getting shoved off a pier in a sinking car, not even an hour after being kidnapped, he was ready to curl up and go

to sleep. Because he felt safe.

And he still did. Part of the fish brain, and could he segregate it anymore? When it was so loud? Told him that this tight space with no predators and safe cover was safe. The only thing pulling him up had been realizing what was happening with Ranboo.

What was wrong with him?

Focus, he dragged him back to the present. Tubbo slipped a hand into Ranboo's. "We're good man." He promised, squeezing hard as he tugged their claws out of the seat. "I've got you. Nothing can get you."

It helped but only a little. Ranboo needed real help, not someone who's most direct experience came from his own panic attacks, being friends with him for a while, and dealing with someone who was too stubborn to admit they even got panic attacks. This was way different then encouraging him into the water or the brief panic interrupted by adrenaline rush. They needed to get out of the water and to an actual safe spot.

He knew the look of a full panic spiral when he saw one. "Tommy and Purpled." Ranboo hissed out, stuttering over the words.

"They're fine, I can wake them up." Tubbo said, starting to flail around with his free hand.

Tubbo pushed harder, with all the experience of someone who had been dragging Tommy out of bed for years. He prodded, pulled, and tugged until finally the weights on him were stirring.

"What the fuck, Tubs." Tommy murmured sleepily. Purpled kept hissing, even as his eyes cracked and he looked at him.

"Wake up." And he head butts Tommy again for good measure. He couldn't do this without them. "We aren't safe here."

It wasn't until he made an odd click whistle, something that felt like the same meaning that Tommy stirred more, awareness coming back into those blue eyes as he looked around. Awareness that quickly turned into rage. "What the fuck?" The other mumbled. "Why the fuck--"

"Who the fuck." Tubbo whispered. Tommy gesticulated widely. "We know all the answers to that."

Whether they wanted to know was another question.

Tubbo felt someone slip between them, Purpled pushing past to reach for Ranboo. "I've seen him like this before." The other grumbled at his answering look. "I did attend some of the field trips when the teacher threatened to drop my grade."

"If you're sure." Tubbo said. He knew Purpled didn't annoy being so, soft was a good term for it. Vulnerable was another. Purpled met his eyes briefly before shifting away. Tommy met

him before he could go too far, wrapping around him with the casual clinginess of an octopus that would never admit it.

“We’re sitting in a car under the ocean. This is not pogchamp. Not even GOAT.” Tommy mumbled, glaring out the window like it offended him. “Those fuckers shoved us in.”

“It makes sense.” Tubbo said, watching the colors swirl in the car. This was the first time they had transformed together. That he remembered and that brought a bitter taste to his mouth. “It sounds like it was building towards a fight.”

He kept glancing towards Ranboo who had finally been coaxed out from wedging himself between the seats and clawing open the chair beside him. Purpled was whispering to him now, coaching him through breathing.

“They did that last time too.” Tommy grumbled, glaring at the seats like they had particularly offended him. It felt weirdly less crowded now that everyone could float. “Dropped us in a fucking tide pool like a Karen decided a library is a daycare.”

“They likely sent George and Sapnap ahead to scope out the area.” Tubbo said with a slow nod. “But in the middle of the day and on one of the docks, why do something so dangerous? What if someone got curious?”

“Not likely.” Purpled said, looking up. Ranboo looked slightly more settled now but his fins were still flared in a way that seemed not good? Somehow? He wasn’t even sure why he knew it meant not good. “A death like the guys on the news meant they would have shut down access to the piers. Anyone who would have ignored the order is already out or would never come to this dock because it’s a piece of shit.”

“Not likely.” Tubbo echoed. He nodded slowly. “They planned this out way ahead of time then. To know this dock would be empty, find us, and get us there.”

So many moving parts, a game played around them until they were playing along but never knowing the rules.

He was almost jealous.

Purpled hissed, making Ranboo jolt. The other turned back. “My god, okay, let’s run through this again because apparently rich guys can’t breath on their own-“

It sounded rude but it was apparently working for Ranboo considering the other was relaxing again. “Then we just ruin it then.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. “We nearly got out before, eh? They’re not even watching us this time like a bunch of morons.”

“I really don’t think it’ll be that easy.” Tubbo said thoughtfully. “I- Tommy you’re going to cut off my airways.”

“No, I’m not.” Tubbo rolled his eyes, reaching out and trying the door. It didn’t open. Like a bastard. Tommy grabbed his hand back.

“You’re such a moron.” Tubbo said, ignoring Tommy furiously shaking his head. “Right. So. I watched Mythbusters once and I’m pretty sure you can’t escape from a car until like, it’s full of water. Because then the pressure becomes equal on both sides and Mother Nature stops being a bitch.”

Purpled slowly looks around. “I don’t think it’s done yet.” He said slowly. Ranboo let out a hysterical giggle.

“You know what I mean.” Tubbo said. “But the car door isn’t opening. Which hopefully means that the doors are just locked but it could mean that either that water broke part of the system or I wouldn’t put it past them to be sabotaged.”

“Layers upon fucking layers.” Tommy said with a grimace. He tugged away from Tubbo and Tubbo took a deep breath, watching as Tommy swam over the seat, reaching for the locks. A click, normally muffled, but unexpectedly loud. Tubbo tugged on the door again.

Nothing. “Either they broke or it’s sabotage.” Tubbo said, glaring at the doors. He heard Ranboo suck in a deep breath behind him. “I mean, it isn’t that big of a deal! We can’t really drown and nothing can really get at us in here. There’s no danger!”

Except for the fact that all that kept the mer away from them was an argument or fight of indeterminate length up on the beach. He glanced out the window but despite the surprising clarity of the water, he couldn’t get a read on anything.

They had to be twenty, maybe twenty five feet down? The dock had been small so he doubted any of the huge fancy boats used it but it definitely was far deeper than a pool. Or the Moon Pool in some areas.

He could see the wooden pillars, crane his head to take in a bit of the dock itself. But nothing more. If the mer were there, they weren’t in the water.

At least above. Tubbo glanced out the window, barely tuning out the conversation behind him. He really wanted to do some actual experiments on this. How far was their sight underwater? It was definitely far clearer than before, though it grew murky further away.

“Tubs. Big T.” Someone prodded their shoulder. “Tell Purpled that the reason they didn’t send someone to check on us is because they’re a bunch of dumbasses.”

“There probably is someone checking on us.” Purpled said sourly. “There’s no way they all got wrapped up in an argument or with ripping each other apart.”

Tubbo considered that. If that was true, that lowered the potential time they had by a lot. The other wouldn’t be waiting for the fight to end, but enough time to swoop in and snag them before the others could fully react. In that case, they just needed to hold out that the process would be too long to be risked.

But he could be wrong and what if they didn’t? Or what if this was just a set up and there were no other mer at all? Another game by Dream? Or maybe he had forgotten yet another calculation, what were the likely sea life around the docks-

Tubbo wheezed as someone elbowed him. “Tubs. Your brain is going too fucking fast and I need you to slow it down and get it back here.” Tommy said, eyes serious. “They clearly are being dumbasses.”

“But why?” Tubbo pointed out. It was exceedingly risky to leave them in the car. “We could have gotten the doors open, gotten out before it sank fully, or even just hurt ourselves like they’re always claiming we would. Why leave us?”

“Because they knew what would happen.” Tubbo’s head snapped to Ranboo who was still hunched over but seemed slightly more relaxed. Slightly. The other looked like he was bathing in spiders, refusing to look up from staring at the seat. “Once you guys transformed, I dunno, man. It was like you all got hit with a tranquilizer.”

And they had, didn’t they? He had bleary memories of being panicked during the transformation and then the sudden boyfriends of nearly falling asleep.

“There’s tranquilizer in the car?” Tommy said, looking suspiciously at the air vents. The fool, the air vents were far too obvious of a hiding spot. He would hide something in those weird mirror flaps the front seats had on the ceiling. Nobody uses those.

“If it were an actual tranquilizer, it would still be affecting us.” Purpled pointed out. “It’s probably some sort of magic trick or weird instinct thing they knew about.”

“But we weren’t affected in the pool!” Tommy argued, glancing at Tubbo. Tubbo shrugged. He didn’t remember much from that night.

“Two of us were apparently on drugs and you two panicked.” Purpled said with the blunt eloquence of a hammer. “Just like Ranboo wasn’t affected because he was having a panic attack.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Tubbo said, interrupting the budding argument. “We need to get out. What about the front or back window?”

“Slower.” Ranboo offered, still staring down. Tubbo nodded.

“It would take longer to break.” Or at least make a hole big enough for all of them after breaking it. He heard the glass might be tougher there too? “But we have a hole in one window already so that’ll speed it up.”

They all turned to contemplate it. “Not a chance.” Purpled said. “You can’t break and enter through a window that small. I’ve tested it.”

“I could fit.” Tommy said. “I fit through things like that! Windows fall before me.”

“When human.” Tubbo pointed out, giving a significant look to all those pretty fins.

It was true the hole was pretty small. Well. Small and large. If they were human and kicked out all the extra glass around the edges, they could squirm through with hopefully just a few small cuts. The problem was, as mer, the overly large fins meant cuts could be serious. They had no clue how much damage could be crippling.

And even if the mer likely had a healer of some kind through magic, Tubbo would not like to pay the price of that unless he had to.

“For most of us.” Ranboo said. He flinched back as they glanced at him. “I mean, Tubbo-“

Tommy’s hands shot to cover his mouth, looking at Tubbo. Tubbo turned to stare at him fully. “Finish the sentence.” He said

“He’s right.” Purpled huffed. “Now isn’t the time for the shortness drama. Out of all of us, you’re the smallest and most likely to get out if we clear some of the glass up. Then you can find something to pick the key lock in the front. There’s tools and wires all over the place around the docks.”

Tubbo glared. Purpled glared back.

It was, however, a fair point. Out of all of them, he was the smallest. If someone helped guide his fins, he was most likely to be able to swim out without taking any or much damage at all.

That didn’t mean he liked to concede that though. But he couldn’t argue now. He’d just have to shove it deep inside and seethe about it until he could later plan vengeance.

There was a soft crackling sound and he looked up. Tommy glanced back from where he was breaking the window, shattering the glass still lingering around the hole with the prongs of the headrest he ripped off from the driver seat. “What?” He said. “I know things.”

“Right.” Tubbo said. “I’ll go through. While I look for a lock pick, you guys work on the front. No point in not setting up for two escapes.”

Tommy worked on the last few bits, finally setting down the headrest when he was satisfied. “Time to roll, Big T.” He said. Tubbo took a deep breath, flicking his tail and awkwardly maneuvering towards the hole.

An unexpected jolt of panic hit him, making him hesitate as he began to swim through. An unexplained sense of danger. The car was safe. The car had his friends. Why leave the car to the undoubtably more dangerous waters outside? Weren’t there sharks who swam around docks?

“You got this.” Hands pushed him forward, carefully helping him tuck his fins as he pushed through. Tommy was always more gentle than he seemed. “It’ll be a race on who can break out the fastest.”

“I’ll win.” Tubbo said. He watched tons of YouTube videos on lock picking.

For all of his panic, it was unexpectedly anticlimactic as he popped out of the window, somersaulting into the water. Tubbo flicked his tail, remembering how it felt to move before flicking it again to move forward. He turned, going further into the shadow of the dock above.

He could hear a lot thumping behind him as Tommy moved up but he didn’t turn back, eyes on the sand as he slowly circled. Purpled had been right, there were a ton of tools and trash

on the seabed. A rusted watch, some sort of hunk of metal that loved vaguely like it might have been a pair of pliers once, even a sunken motor. Someone must have had a really bad day.

But nothing small enough to fit the lock. He picked up a piece of wire for a moment before dropping it when he realized it was just a flimsy bit of electrical wire.

And alone, he couldn't help the growing panic. That none of this mattered.

Even if they broke the windshield or picked the lock, there were mer literally on the dock above. All it took was one person looking down and seeing the moving shadow or Tommy trying to break the glass. If they hadn't already.

How far would they get? They had already gotten caught twice. The mer were on high alert. They'd need to make a break for it and try to swim up the beach without them noticing which seemed like a horribly bad plan in general but what were the other options? It was that or the open sea.

The open sea where the mer literally lived. Not a stellar idea. But it frustrated Tubbo as he turned it over and over in his head, even as he quickly examined a partially buried screwdriver handle before realizing the metal part had long since disappeared.

He was supposed to have plans. But how could he plan around this? Another storm maybe, but something told him that would be vanishingly unlucky. From Tommy's description? They were fueled by the moon and being well rested and fed. Right now, they were tired and panicked.

Bad.

But it was the panic that made Tubbo notice. He froze, some instinct making him sink to the seabed and half burying himself in the muck. Something was here.

The uncomfortable feeling of oozing mud lasted half a moment before hands were pulling him up and out, ignoring his hissing and snapping. "That's disgusting, kid." A voice- now he very unfortunately recognized that voice.

Schlatt. Tubbo swings his head back, disappointed when he met the push of a hand and not the crunch of a nose. "Let me go!" He snapped, head jerking to look at the car. When had he gotten so far? He could barely see it, off on the hazy edge of his vision.

Schlatt made a sharp click. "None of that, you'll get attention." He said, pressing Tubbo's arms to his sides.

"And who will that go worse for?" Tubbo threw back at him. "I'm guessing they don't know you're down here."

"Hot in one. They think I'm handling the politics. Quackity's handling this." Schlatt said, far too easily for Tubbo's trump card. "Who will that go worse for, me or the guy who's supposed to be in that car?"

Well, fuck. Tubbo had been hoping they wouldn't notice that. "I'm not doing anything wrong." He defended. Technically. No one told them that they had to stay in the car. Technically.

"Sure, kid." Schlatt said, his eyes full of mirth when Tubbo wished a glance back. His grip readjusted, gentler but no less firm. "But you shouldn't be out here. There's plenty of things that could eat you."

"Like you?"

"If you want to be technical about it then yeah. I could eat you." Schlatt drawled and Tubbo couldn't help the full body flinch. "I'm not. It would be a stupid idea anyways. I like gambling but not enough to gamble on snagging another pup I like immediately."

Well, he was going to ignore that. "You can't kidnap me!" Tubbo argued.

"Why not?" Schlatt said, glancing around theatrically. "Last I checked, Philza was meeting his hot wife, Techno and Wilbur are distracted with Dream, and Quackity's fielding Puffy while Charlie slimes their restaurant. And any chump in the water here, I know I can outmaneuver them."

"I don't want to go." Tubbo hissed back. He didn't! He wanted to be normal again!

"Really. You don't." Schlatt said. A beat, Schlatt letting it draw out masterfully but Tubbo couldn't deny the effect. "You want to stay on an island with no clue what you are around people who'd turn on you the moment they get the whiff of something fishy."

"As opposed to someone who kidnaps me." Tubbo said. "You really can't be arguing yourself as the safer one here."

"Ni-uh-uh. I am the safer one." Schlatt said. "I know all about you Tubbo. I know about your parents, your history, I know about all the homes that turned you away."

Tubbo's breath stuttered in his chest.

"Stupidly." Schlatt added. "The more time I spend around ya, the more I think I would have shoved ya in the pool myself."

"I can't-" He might have read his file but that didn't mean he knew them. But it was hard saying that when he could feel the gentle hold, almost a hug around him, the burning eyes in his neck.

"Why run from what you want? A home that would never give you up or die?" Schlatt coaxed. "A home that sees what your personality is as a perk, not a pest?"

Tubbo swallowed hard, trying to force himself back on track. How much time did he have left? Not much. And even if he did, he was literally in Schlatt's arms with the others too far to help. And if they did, it would be them vs Schlatt with a hostage and he just saw how that would play out with Dream and Tommy's escape. His bargaining chip was gone with Schlatt's casual disregard of the others. Even if it was bluff, he'd spend time breaking it.

But he didn't want to roll over and give up.

And he did have one bargaining chip left. One deck of cards to play.

"I'll go with you. Willingly. No fight." Tubbo said. He could hear Schlatt's chuckle. "But after a week. And you let my friends go free. Here and afterwards."

"Why should I?" Schlatt said. "Or I could go for the gold and get all of you."

"Risk for all or one guaranteed capture." Tubbo said, and he nearly tilts his chip before realizing how dumb that was with Schlatt behind him. "I won't fight, I'll stay wherever you keep me and won't escape anymore. But they won't be included in this. And I get a week to deal with everything."

"A day." His heart jumped but Tubbo kept it pressed down. No need to risk the gamble on revealing a flinch.

"Three days." He said. All cards on the table and he was playing for keeps. "And you provide a distraction while I get the others out."

For a moment, he thinks Schlatt will say no. That the other will laugh and sweep him away to their lair or drag him back into his instincts. But there's no point giving up on a deal not done.

"Deal. Three days, and you come to me." Schlatt said, his voice dripping in satisfaction. Warm metal pressed into his hands as Schlatt released his hold and Tubbo nearly fumbled the grab, pulling the metal close. Lock picks. New ones. "I'll see you then, pup."

Tubbo waits for one beat, half not believing it and half strangely longing for the warm hug back. How long had it been since an adult hugged him?

Before turning and bolting for the car. Tommy was pressed up against the door as Tubbo fumbled with the lock, tumbling out. "Tubbo, did someone grab you? What happened?" He said, grabbing Tubbo's face and checking him for bruises.

He looked away and met calculating violet eyes. Purpled had seen as well. Another shift and it's Ranboo staring back, eyes wide with fear.

"We need to go." Tubbo mumbled finally, pulling Tommy further away. "I made a deal to buy us some time."

"A deal for what." Purpled said. Tubbo pretended to ignore him, gently pulling Ranboo out next. Above, he heard a thumping noise, reverberating through the water. "You'll need to come clean eventually."

Tubbo knew that well, pulling Ranboo free and letting Purpled dart out next. He knew that even as he could feel Schlatt's smile on his back.

He just needed to buy some time.

To make sure they wouldn't follow him if the cards fell.

Chapter End Notes

Very happy with how this chapter worked out after changing my plans.

Dad Schlatt playing the long game. How long can Tubbo keep this house of cards up?
Can he dodge this deal?

And because I want to talk about it, yup, pups do have an automatic relaxation mode to being submerged in enclosed or partially enclosed spots. It's very comforting particularly when guardians (or potential guardians) are nearby because pups are very Smol and the ocean is very Not Smol and being in a Smol place means nothing can get you. It normally doesn't hit that hard but all of them are exhausted and running on adrenaline so the rush of instinctual safety hit like a brick except for Ranboo whose phobia gave him an override.

Stormy Weather

Chapter Notes

Deals have been made, conversations must be had, and a few secrets must be revealed

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Swimming away should feel relieving.

And it doesn't. As he swims, Tubbo becomes more and more aware of a twisting feeling in his belly. A strange feeling of terror, a strong feeling that wants him to go back. Yearning. A need for something that he doesn't want to think of as sunlight dapples through the water that they swim through.

He wants to go back. To someone that he barely knew, who likely killed people, and was trying to kidnap him. Someone who had looked at him and felt like he was really looking, who seemed kind and caring and actually interested in Tubbo. The fish brain chirped mournfully, tugging slightly.

Five minutes. He thought. Maybe ten if the time slipped away. And somehow it had completely flipped? More investigation would have to be done in the future because that was incredibly odd. He had never loved someone that fast. None of their foster homes, none of the social workers, not even Tommy.

It had taken a while for him and Tommy to be friends and he didn't regret a minute of it. But it kind of grossed him out how similar that same feeling felt to his time with Schlatt.

"Tubs." Tubbo jolted as something flicked his shoulder. Tommy darted through the water, his fins flashing as he circled back, brushing past Tubbo again. "I've been trying to talk to you for so fucking long. What are you doing? Big man thoughts?"

"Like what was going on back there." Purpled said, not beating around the bush. He was swimming a bit further back, tugging Ranboo along by the wrist. Ranboo was swimming slower, eyes focused on the seafloor still, his skin- scales strangely pale. "And who you were talking to."

"You couldn't see?" Tubbo said. But after a moment, he realizes that was right. He hadn't been able to see the car well when Schlatt had corner him. Obviously, they had likely not been able to see him well enough to see who he was meeting. Just that something had happened. And the thought made him hesitate.

He could lie. He was good at lying. He had done it before and was very well practiced. With a lie, they wouldn't have to know what had happened. Not forever, not to them. But long

enough that he could plan, long enough that he could get out of it. Or maybe make it so that it wouldn't matter. Surely, he could do this.

If they didn't know where he was, maybe it wouldn't matter. And all the consequences would belong to him. All benefits, no downsides. For anyone but him. Wouldn't that be fair? This was his fault after all.

"I've never seen you without your glasses, Ranboo." Tubbo tried, skirting around the conversation. "What happened?"

"They got knocked off in the car when it hit the water." Purpled said as Ranboo shrunk into himself. No, not shrinking. Hiding his face. "I saw them go under the seat but we couldn't fish them out."

"Your eyes are sick." Tommy said. "What's with the sunglasses?"

"Don't like people seeing my face." Ranboo mumbled, motioning. "S'why I wear the masks and the glasses."

"Oh." Tubbo cringed a bit, looking away. "Maybe we can use some seaweed or something-"

"It's fine. You guys are fine." Ranboo mumbled. "You can look. It's not a big deal. Just, don't like everyone else."

And despite himself, Tubbo can't help the little bit of warmth in his chest at the trust in Ranboo's eyes when the other looks up. It sinks immediately as he's reminded that he kind of, maybe, broke that.

"Tubbo." Tommy said, his blue eyes flickering between rage and the tiniest shred of hurt that he knew Tommy was trying to bury when it came up. Tommy never liked looking sad. "You promised that you wouldn't lie anymore or hide things. You can't promise and go back on it like a bitch."

"But this might be a good secret." Tubbo argued, glancing away. He swore he could still feel Schlatt's eyes on him. Or maybe that was just the anxiety. Being in the ocean while a mer was doing bad things to his nerves. He couldn't tell if the feeling of being watched was legit or just the fish brain acting up again.

"Will it be to us? Or do you just think it'll be?" Ranboo mumbled. Tubbo winced as his eyes caught on searching heterochromatic ones, Ranboo peeking up from the ocean floor. "If anything happens, do you really think all of us just won't care about it? After what happened when you went missing?"

"I never said that." Tubbo protested. He knew that they would care! He even knew that Purpled and Ranboo would care. Their actions had proven that, fish brain influence or not, they really were friends now. And he still felt guilty about the panic he had inadvertently, well fuck that, that Wilbur had caused by being a bastard. "I wouldn't think that badly of you."

“Then why won’t you just come out and fucking say it? What bastard talked to you? What did he fucking say?” Tommy said, his acrobatics becoming wilder. Tubbo winced a bit. “Why won’t you fucking talk about it instead of dancing around this shit, huh?”

Because it was hard! Because it was his choice to make that stupid deal and he wanted to save them and not drag them down! But he didn’t know how to say that!

“You traded yourself to them, didn’t you.”

You could have dropped a mako shark in the middle of their little pod and gotten less of a response. Tubbo felt his stomach drop like a stone at Purpled’s calm voice. No, not calm. Purpled’s eyes were seething with barely suppressed rage, the only thing holding it back was frigid ice. They knew and had guessed it without any hesitation.

“You didn’t.” Ranboo whispered, his scales so pale that they were practically gray. “Tubbo, tell him that you wouldn’t do that.”

“It’s the only avenue that makes sense.” Purpled drawled, every word carefully leashed and measured. The worst part was how frustrated he sounded. Tubbo could handle angry. Tommy was perpetually angry. What was worse was the frustration. “Whatever we saw had to be one of them with the size and sound. They allowed us to go free and presumably they’re why the others haven’t hunted us down yet. And everything has a price. Last I checked, Tubbo doesn’t have his wallet on him.”

Tubbo folded in on himself a bit under their expectant looks. Purpled looked frustrated. Ranboo looked scared. And Tommy... he looked absolutely devastated before the rage swept back in. It was time for the truth. There wasn’t a good reason to continue the charade anymore. “It was fair enough. Me in exchange for help escaping and a distraction.”

“I’m going to fucking kill him.” Tommy said savagely, spinning. Tubbo felt a surprised chirp slip out, twisting to grab the other by the arm before he could go. “Leggo! He’s fucking dead! I knew he was a wrongun!”

“If you go back, they’ll catch you!” Tubbo yelled. He beat his tail frantically, wishing he had legs that could dig into the ground and help hold Tommy back from his campaign of fury. How had the other mer held them so easily? “I don’t think the deal stretched that far!”

“Who was it?” Ranboo asked. Tommy paused, obviously having not considered that little factor. Tubbo shook his head. This was why he preferred to plan their murderous campaigns of fury when necessary. He loved Tommy but both had very different beliefs on the application of chaos.

He hesitated. Maybe if he didn’t tell them, Tommy couldn’t hunt them down? And they’d be safe.

“Schlatt.” Tubbo twitched and Purpled nodded. “Philza didn’t seem like he would bother with it, Niki and Puffy probably would have followed you, and Dream would have chased us halfway down the coast. Anyone lower, and you wouldn’t be so confident they would hold to their end of the deal. How long do you have?”

“Three days.” Tubbo admitted. There was no point in hiding it. He got five seconds before Tommy tackled him, wrapping around him like an octopus with a vengeance. Tubbo relaxed into the touch. Tommy didn’t seem mad that Tubbo had gone over his head. That was good. He could live with that. “It was really the best choice! Now that I’ve done that, he’ll leave you guys alone for now.”

“But for you, you fucking dumbass.” Tommy snapped. “Did you really think I was going to just let you disappear off into the fucking ocean? Without even a fucking goodbye? Without any answers? Because some wrongun-”

“Why don’t you just not do it?” Ranboo interrupted. He flinched at their questioning looks. “I mean, we’re escaping from them anyways? It’s not like it’s any different if you like? You just have to not show up in a few days. Which, easy. We can do that. I, uh, don’t know if you really thought of that but maybe? Or not.”

“No, there is a point there.” Tubbo agreed, considering the scenario. After all, what really did stop him from just not showing up? After all, Schlatt hadn’t really done anything. He could just keep ignoring him once the three days were up. Maybe he’d just hide out at-

And his chest seized. Tubbo chirped with panic as he sank for a moment, everything locking up in a strange wave of pins and needles. In the back of his head, the fish brain wailed with fear. It was only Tommy’s intervention that kept him floating as the sensation passed a second later, the pins and needles sensation vanishing like it was never there in the first place.

“Tubbo? What the fuck was that?” Tommy said, shaking him frantically. Tubbo took a deep breath, shuddering. “What the fuck did you do?”

“I think I had fifty panic attacks at once. Or one big one after drinking ten cans of redbull.” Tubbo said, shuddering again. That had been a really bad night but on the positive side, he passed his exams! “That felt bad. But I didn’t do anything but-”

Tubbo thought about not showing up again. It was even worse the second time, Purpled having to support his weight before he dragged Tommy down into the mud. It took longer for his limbs to wake up this time, feeling slowly returning until he could float on his own. “I was just thinking about not going.” He said. And then Tubbo groaned as it hit him. “It’s fucking magic, isn’t it.”

He had thought of mer abilities as maybe elemental or biological. But if someone could teleport, or call storms, or sing people to a beach to drown them, what stopped someone from having the ability to reinforce their deals?

“I’m so jealous right now.” Purpled whispered under his breath, looking strangely starry eyed for a moment before he shook it off. “Are you telling me that you can’t just not go back?”

“I mean, I don’t remember setting up a meeting place.” Tubbo shrugged, a very awkward motion when he was technically being supported by the others. He stopped himself from considering again, trying to shove that thought away. “But if he comes for me, I don’t think I can rationally fight back.”

This was way worse than he had planned it to be. He had never anticipated Schlatt having that much sway. Instincts, yes, but magic like this? He couldn't risk getting caught off guard like this again. What would happen if he had gotten to the others?

Purpled clamped a hand over Tommy's mouth, muffling the stream of furious swears. "Right." He said. "You are paying me so much for this. Let's go back to Fundy's house and see if he found anything. We're going to need it."

Fuck.

"You know when I said they would get along like a house on fire, I didn't actually mean setting stuff on fire." Tubbo said idly, resting his chin on his hands.

Tommy and Purpled were glaring at each other while sitting by their kiddie pools, each trying to light a waterproof match and then extinguish it. Purpled had gotten his lit but was struggling with the actual extinguishing part. Tommy hadn't even lit his yet, scraping at the box like it owed him money. Each was so careful not to touch the water, making his stomach sink a bit.

It was strangely pretty if he ignored that, watching how the light from the matches flickered over the ground. In the fading twilight, it looked almost like fireflies. If fireflies made angry hissing noises and flickered when you dunked them in water.

Was this the point where he should tell them that those were waterproof matches?

"Yeah, no, nobody could see this coming. Definitely not after you gave them a box of matches each." Ranboo said, shading his eyes as he leaned on the table next to him. "Nope, no way."

"I'm glad you agreed with me." Tubbo said cheerily. Tommy threw an unlit match at Purpled who yelled, nearly toppling into his own kiddie pool. "I love it when a good plan comes together."

Oh, it looked like they had forgotten the extinguishing competition in favor of throwing the matches at each other.

"Should we take those away from them before they start pelting each other with lit matches?" Fundy said because he was a weirdo who was concerned about things like fire safety and not burning each other. Tubbo and Ranboo looked at each other, shrugging. Well, Tubbo shrugged. Ranboo winced, stomping out a patching of grass that had started smoking.

"But what else would we do?" Tubbo whined. Fundy's backyard was pathetic. Most of it was taken up by this hideous concrete patio that somebody thought was fashionable years ago and never stopped to consider good things like maybe not ruining their backyard with concrete. The grassy area made him cringe a bit with those odd memories and flickers of recognition. And they couldn't exactly leave.

They could throw the deck furniture around again but Tommy had accidentally thrown the second deck chair over the fence and the neighbors refused to return it.

Hence why Tubbo had established his dibs on the remaining deck chair and battled ferociously to hold onto it. Ranboo, Purpled, and Tommy could take the ground or table like the peasants they were. Fundy wasn't even part of the equation.

The only remaining interest were the kiddie pools, some relics of the people who had lived in Fundy's house before his family moved in. He had dug them out of the bottom of a closet, clearly tossed there and forgotten for good reason.

They were just as hideous as the concrete patio but in an adorable kind of way that had Tommy resist Tubbo's initial suggestions that they toss them in the sea so Mother Nature could destroy the unholy abominations.

"Is there any news at all?" Ranboo asked, looking at the house. "They've been talking to each other for a while."

"I don't know." Fundy said, frustrated. He glanced back at the door, the fiftieth time in five minutes, chewing on his bottom lip. "I've heard her talking to Professor Kristin before but usually they don't talk without me in there too."

Tubbo glanced at the door as well. Professor Kristin. Allegedly, an overseas professor who had hinted at knowing about mer, that got excited when she accidentally accessed some of Sally's illicit tests today. A confrontation.

"You listen to them?" Ranboo asked. Behind them, Tommy screeched as Purpled got bored with matches, a windstorm whipping his curls into a frenzy.

"Yeah, most of it is interesting. She does a lot of deep sea research. Really freaking cool stuff." Fundy said. "I did some coding research for her once! Nothing huge, just some number crunching and program coding for a tiny project rerun."

"Maybe we should eavesdrop then." Tubbo suggested. They were practically being given permission! In spirit at least. Even if Sally had kicked them out of the house immediately. Fundy had listened to them before so that should make it okay for them to do it again.

"Ranboo, you guard-"

"Please don't." Someone interrupted, making Tubbo jump. He turned back, throwing on an innocent smile as Professor Kristin pushed her way through the back door. She didn't look like he imagined a marine biologist would look but he had only ever seen two of them.

"Boys! Stop playing with matches."

Purpled and Tommy grumbled, beginning to pick up the remaining matches. Tubbo was pleased to see the wind had disappeared. Kristin might know about mer, but he didn't want them knowing too much about them.

"It's fine." Sally said, stepping out behind her. Dark shadows clung under her eyes, her wild red curls looking even wilder as she shook her head. "Really. Not a big deal at all. Our yard

has seen worse.”

“It’s not very safe for them.” Kristin said. She caught Tubbo’s eyes, smiling. “I’m guessing you’re Tubbo then? That must be Ranboo because Fundy’s right there and those two must be Purpled and Tommy.”

“Yeah?” Tommy said, looking up. “What’s the news for us? Did you whip up some sort of magical cure.”

“Not exactly, Sally said, her shoulders slumping as she sat on the bare concrete porch. That wasn’t good Not at all. “I got the chance to run some tests but the prognosis wasn’t good. At all. What would have been good was if the DNA was just mutated or controlled by an external factor but the DNA you have as mer is completely different. I wouldn’t even say you were part of the same species, let alone the same person. Whatever hits you in the water, that’s not something basic gene therapy can fix.”

Tubbo’s world shattered. He had guessed but the hope had been there. The magic was fallible and this would all go away. He felt Ranboo’s hand land on his shoulder, squeezing hard. But it couldn’t hide how Ranboo’s hand was shaking, or Tommy’s frustrated curse.

That didn’t sound like something that could be fixed in three days. And if this mer thing didn’t disappear, Schlatt would never stop chasing him. The deal would go through.

“And that’s where I come in.” Kristin said, surveying them. “What do you boys know about the full moon that comes around every fifty years?”

“It comes around every fifty years.” Purpled deadpanned. “Let me guess. It’s magical too. Pay me and I’ll keep guessing.”

“No, not necessary. Let me tell you a story. The continuation of one you may have heard before”

Chapter End Notes

A bit shorter, but I really wanted to focus on some of the plot elements and characters in this chapter. Tubbo really took it over with his debate between his friends and trying to protect them.

And yup! Can confirm, Schlatt is able to basically force people to follow through with their deals. Brutal ability for a politician.

Control

Chapter Notes

This chapter isn't too heavy in the warnings but Ranboo is heavy on anxiety!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Sally told me that she told you what she knew of the story.” Kristin said. Ranboo eyes her warily from where he sits. Part of him wonders if she's safe but he dismisses the panic as soon as it rises.

He's been panicked all day. It's been growing worse recently. Not just the fear that rose as he was dumped into the ocean, but the fear of just- being around people. Even Fundy had made him strangely jittery, and not in the angered lack of trust way.

It was getting worse. And he thought he couldn't be more nervous around people. Ranboo hunched in on himself, feeling more than seeing the way Tommy artlessly collapsed down next to him. It makes him feel just a little less nervous but the fluttering still lingers in his chest.

“I guess.” Tubbo said. “That weird romantic story, yeah? With the fisherman and the mer and the pool of water.”

Ranboo nods along. He remembered the story. Had personally thought it was a little weird because the mer he had seen- nevermind.

(He didn't know why the fisherman would join the mer. Now he wondered.)

Kristin smiled. “Exactly!” She said. “One of my specializations is history, marine history to be exact. It can teach us so much about the ocean around us. And it's part of what led me to find the rest of the story.”

“There's more?” Tommy asked. “Isn't it like, happily ever after? Fisherman got the fish wife.”

“Unfortunately, no.” Kristin said, her smile falling for a minute. For a moment, Ranboo thinks he sees something more, a flicker of shadow in her eyes and then it's gone and he couldn't help but instantly second guess himself.

Was he really seeing shadows in everyone now? Kristin hadn't even done anything wrong and Sally had known her for ages!

So then why did something about her make him nervous? Or was that the normal nervousness? He couldn't even tell at this point and it was stressing him out.

Maybe it's because his glasses fell earlier, Ranboo thought to himself, wrapping his arms around his knees. That made sense. Fundy had a cheap pair of sunglasses but they didn't feel quite right. The fit was wrong. The shade was off. He couldn't shake the thought that people were looking at him.

If it was just his friends he'd be okay but there were so many people here. Ranboo took low measured breaths, wishing he could go to the library. His nerves were just playing up too much.

"Anyways." Kristin said. "After a long time, the story has a sequel of sorts. A betrayal."

"Betrayal." Tubbo said, interest instantly piqued as he leaned forward. As does Tommy and Purpled. Sometimes, Ranboo wonders if he should be concerned about his friends and their taste of blood. Then again, he got someone killed.

Purpled didn't let him see the photo. But he knew it anyway.

Ranboo really wanted to go to the library but he forced himself to stay in place, trying not to think about how uncomfortable the open yard was. He hung onto the story, trying to get his brain to stop running in circles for a while.

"A betrayal." Kristin said, as airily as if she was talking about the weather. "Years after the miracle that happened on the island, the fisherman and his wife had long since settled. She taught him the ways of the ocean, the hunt, the ways the storms swirled out of magic. Their family grew with the arrival of pups."

Ranboo couldn't help but shudder at those words. He was never going to be able to watch cute puppy videos on youtube again. It just sounded straight up wrong now.

"But the village on the island was less happy. They saw the fisherman as a traitor of sorts, a betrayal of some kind. And so they sought to rectify it with a betrayal of their own." Kristin said, her tone slightly sour. "They refused the life they lived up until then and sought war."

Ranboo let out a slightly hysterical snicker, making Tommy nudge him. Well, damn, who could have expected that. Ranboo had only known about Mer for a while now and they had nearly broken his ankle, tried to eat him, tried to kidnap him, and murdered people. And that's not even covering what they admitted to doing to the villagers of Mako Island.

Like, damn. Totally unexpected. So rude. Why would anyone do that? Man.

Like, he knew things could be black and white? But this didn't feel like that. Whoever told Kristin this story must have been a big romance enthusiast.

"Every year, once a year, the fisherman returns to the island and the pool that had made him. A trip of nostalgia, to show the pups where their father had come from and to see the island where he had once lived." Kristin continued. "And it was on that day that the villagers decided to strike."

“How did they know?” Tubbo asked, leaning forward. “Isn’t there a tunnel under the pool? How could they know where he was going?”

“Changes in hunting patterns.” Kristin said, her smile never wavering. Sally hummed, nodding slightly.

“That’s how we used to track them when Fundy was younger, to see if they were following us.” She said, ruffling a hand through her hair. “Looking at where fish are plentiful, large prey turning up dead, even human deaths. They don’t move often but if you know the patterns, you can see it.”

Ranboo winced hard at the mention of human deaths before flinching back as Tommy pinched him. “Ow, what was that for, man?” He asked. He didn’t deserve this!

“Pay attention to the story, Ranboob. We’re getting lore here from a pretty lady and I for one do not think you are doing a good job of paying attention.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. Ranboo blinked quickly. Wait, did he just call him-

“You know my name is Ranboo, right?” He whispered. Tommy mouthed ‘Ranboob’ back to him and Ranboo slowly put his head in his hands. Why? Why was this his life? “That’s my name, you’ve said it right before!”

“Boys, settle down.” Kristin said and Ranboo’s head snapped back to her. “And let me finish the story. It won’t take much longer now.”

“Did they try to kill him?” Tommy said, jittering in place. Ranboo’s eyes went wide. Was that even possible? Techno had been freakishly strong, not to mention Bad teleporting or Dream’s- Dream’s everything. “How the fuck do you kill one of them?”

“Oh no! They didn’t try to kill them.” Kristin said, laughing as she shakes her head. “Most humans don’t stand a chance against mer! But back then, when the world was older, some humans figured out a way of- mimicking them. Taking energy from nature and directing it through potions or items.”

“Is that still possible now?” Fundy asked, leaning closer. It sounded absolutely ridiculous but honestly, Ranboo could accept it. He turned into a mermaid when he touched the water, how ridiculous was the idea that potions were a thing? Or enchanted items?

“How would I know?” Kristin said, shrugging as her smile turned mischievous. “In the context of the story, the potion itself is unknown. Whatever the witch did, they wove something together they should have never made. A corruption of the full moon, fueled by time. Something cursed and woven in darkness and secrecy over the year as they waited for the mer to arrive again.”

In darkness and secrecy. He could almost see it. How the villagers had hidden every step of the process. Gathering ingredients in hidden areas and stealing moments away to brew.

What hard things had driven them to do that? Would he even want to know?

“Whoever the witch was, they never taught the secret. For as soon as they entered the Moon Pool’s cavern, they died.” Kristin said, shaking her head. Ranboo started to shake again. “But it was too late. The glass shattered, spreading into the pool. And the fisherman stilled. His change, born of death, the corruption struck him far harder than his family.”

“What was it meant to do then?” Tubbo asked. “Because clearly, the Moon Pool is fine.”

“It was meant to destroy the magic of the pool and its gift forever.” Kristin said, looking up at the sky. Ranboo shook his head.

“Uh, yeah, definitely didn’t happen.” He said. “Can confirm. Am Mer. Unfortunately.”

“It’s quite fortunate considering what could have happened.” Kristin said. “After all, you could have died.”

Oh. Yeah. No. Ranboo winced, rubbing his arms as he glanced at his friends. Yeah, as terrible as this was, he was glad they hadn’t died there. If they had died there, he never would have gotten to know his friends. He would have died and they would have died and would anyone know what happened?

“It was meant to.” Kristin said. “But even with stolen magic, mer on the full moon were far stronger. The mer of the Abyssal realm fought the curse to save her husband and in the end, narrowly prevailed. But all magic comes with a price and this was no different. Her husband returned to her, whole and hale and a mer once again. But in return, the curse would return. And she could never again take on the form of a human.”

“Ironic.” Purpled said quietly. Ranboo nodded along, slowly turning it over in his head. It was a dramatic story but he kind of wished she had gotten to the key point faster instead of telling it. That being, how this would fix them. But he couldn’t exactly point that out because it would have been kind of rude? “I’m guessing, that the curse reverts mers to humans.”

“And so when he turned back, he was dying due to what happened when he was a human.” Tubbo said, jumping up. “It’s settled! We lure him there and kill him as a show of power and a warning not to mess with us.”

Ranboo really hoped that was Tubbo’s joking smile as everyone turned to stare at the other. “Won’t, uh, that get us murdered then?” He asked slowly. “Being that his wife is still around. And sounds very murderous.”

He would much rather a solution that came with them all being alive at the end. Call him picky, he knows. But he was so tired of the terror and the death. Ranboo wanted to be with his friends without having to worry about being kidnapped.

“That isn’t necessary.” Kristin said, clearing her throat. “When the moon of fifty years arrives, you can instead use it to reverse your own transformation. By touching the water of the pool as the full moon shines upon it, the magic will reverse. It’ll be like it never happened.”

Ranboo sucked in a quick breath. They would be free. Only vaguely did he remember what happened in the Moon Pool but that fit it, right? He remembers being coaxed into the water, the full moon above them, and the rush of something happening. Not much beyond that though.

“So, what? We go back to the island and take a bath?” Tommy said, forehead furrowing as he fidgeted. “That’s how we fucking fix it? We go back to the place that caused it in the first place?”

“Will this even work in the long term?” Purpled said pensively. Ranboo’s shoulders slumped. He could almost see the hope evaporating in front of him. This was depressing. “Pu- What stops someone from just taking us back during the next full moon? They know we survived it the first time and it stands to reason they might just decide to try again.”

“Theoretically, it should be permanent.” Kristin said. She shrugged. “Unfortunately for what you want, it’s never been tested. People who change in the first place are so rare that never has it been tested. The only reason the change is even known is due to the story passed on by the Abyssal Mer.”

“It matches records though.” Fundy said, looking up from the phone he was holding. “Records are weird but there is one month that had absolutely no deaths. They could be avoiding it on that night.”

“But then we have to get there.” Tubbo pointed out. The elephant in the room. Ranboo felt his breathing quicken at the thought of going back to the place he nearly died in more ways than one.

Techno had been so kind on the boat and in the library. Well, not kind? But he wasn’t as effortlessly callous as Wilbur had been. Or maybe not that either? Because now that he thought about it, those Sun Tzu quotes might have been vague murder threats? Cross that off of his bucket list.

“That’s not going to be easy. They were toying with us when I found Tubbo and tried to escape from them.” Purpled said, leaning back into the grass as he idly lit a match before extinguishing it again. “And if they think they know what we’re doing, they won’t let us anywhere near the island. Out in the boat, we’ll be sitting ducks to one strong push.”

Ranboo shivered at the thought, stomach lurching. He felt someone catch his hand and squeeze it hard but it didn’t stop the urge of paranoia. They’d be so far out to sea and it would be so deep. If they fell in-

He couldn’t do it. He wouldn’t. He couldn’t fall in like that again.

And if they even got on the island, they had barely outrun Techno. And now the other pods knew, pods with people who could teleport or light fires or parkour. Could they outrun them too? Ranboo only had one sprint mode and it was kinda bad.

“I can fucking take them.” Tommy spat. Ranboo tried to focus in but it was harder now, panic making his thoughts feel slippery and hard to grab. He wanted to hide. He didn’t want to be

here right now. He wanted to bury himself somewhere and never come out. “I can fucking crush them actually. Easy. No one can stand up to a big man like me.”

“Tommy.” Tubbo said, just his name and yet Ranboo could hear the plea behind it. “What happens if you lose? There’s so many of them.”

“I just won’t.” Tommy sniffed like it was just that easy. But even he looked a bit uncertain. Fundy hunched down when Ranboo glanced at him, staring at his phone. “There’s a lot of emr but I’m the biggest man ever.”

And there they went. Back to the start again. Whether to stay or leave, Ranboo hated it. He hated the uncertainty of it all. Because it all came back down to one unshakeable fact.

“I dunno, man. I know we’re debating it but do we even have a choice?” Ranboo said, hunching into himself when everyone looked at him. “It’s a really bad idea but they’re never going to stop coming after us. We’ve been getting lucky so far but each time, we lose more and more ground. I don’t know how I’m going to explain my new diet when my parents get back and Dream got into our school. They know where we live and where Sally lives now. That’s not even counting the singing thing or the teleportation or-”

Warm arms slung around his shoulder. “Boo is right.” Tubbo said firmly. “We can’t stay here as Mer forever. It’s only a matter of time before we-you guys slip up.”

“We already have.” Tommy said stubbornly and Ranboo felt Tubbo’s arms tightened. Sally glanced between them, sharing a look with Fundy.

“It’s just me-”

“None of us are letting you go alone.” Ranboo said, his head dropping on top of Tubbo’s. It was comfortable here. Familiar. Almost as good as the library but not quite. Not quite right. “We’re like zebras or something. One of us goes and how much longer do you think the rest of us have?”

If they didn’t give themselves up outright, even the thought of Tubbo being taken stressed him out. He had no doubt that if Tubbo was taken, he would hit a full on meltdown and it would not be pretty or productive.

Quiet.

“Fucking zebras, big man?” Tubbo said, his shoulders starting to shake. Ranboo threw up his hands with mock frustration. “That- why that?”

“I dunno, man! It was the first thing I thought of!” But that didn’t stop Purpled from smirking or Tommy bursting into wheezing laughter. Even Fundy was shaking slightly. “Either way, without this, what’s the plan for Schlatt?”

“What about him?” Sally interjected. “How did you get wrapped up with him? He’s as slippery as a snake with his words but I wouldn’t trust him with even a cactus. How did you end up dealing with him?”

“You know him?” Tubbo said. He had stilled in Ranboo’s arms. That was probably bad. He tried to squeeze a bit harder, hoping it would make Tubbo feel better.

“I had to dodge his influence a lot.” Sally said, pursing her lips. Her voice dripped with anger. “We’ve never met but- back when mer were looking for Fundy, he took advantage of some tricky legal channels. After Wilbur himself, he came the closest to finding us.”

“About that.” Fundy said quietly, staring down at his hands. “Is it possible for the pool to stop a transformation that hasn’t happened yet? Like, is this thing a permanent vaccine? Or does it only stop one that has happened?”

Oh. Oh man. He was still mad, even if he understood better now, but he almost wanted to hug Fundy. It was weird to remember that the nervous breakdown he had been having for a long time now was something Fundy had to fear his entire life.

Kristin shook her head slowly. “I wouldn’t know.” She said, “No one had ever risked trying that out before and if the curse took that form, the mer wouldn’t pass that along. But it could be worth a try.”

“You don’t have to.” Sally said, stepping closer to her son. Ranboo wondered if he should look away as she gently cradled his face. “We can handle it. You can stay home that night and I’ll bring the four over.”

“See, I don’t think we have a choice but to try.” Fundy said, throwing his phone into the soft grass. “They know where we live! They know what I look like and- look. I know. I know about the emails you got.”

The emails.

The anger. “Schlatt’s trying again.” Tubbo guessed. “Not just him, but he’s the only one who would bother to email.”

“My custody of Fundy is being challenged.” Sally said, the words short and clipped. He could see how Tommy and Tubbo both winced even as Ranboo flinched back into his seat. But Sally and Fundy loved each other! How could the legal system listen to Schlatt over them? “Technically, because I ran away, my custody was never settled. But it’s not something you should have seen.”

“I snooped.” Fundy said. “Alright? I snooped. I did that. And I’m not sorry about it. I don’t want them taking custody of me for stupid reasons. I want to go home and not have to worry about them showing up.”

It seemed fitting then that a caw would sound out. It was almost comical how everyone jumped. He did too! He could comment on it! Tubbo spilled out of his lap with a yelp and an annoyed glare. Ranboo’s head jerked up, pushing up his sunglasses to stare at the fence.

A sea gull.

Kristin laughed, shaking her head but Tommy jumped to his feet, storming over. “Get out of here bitch.” He said. Ranboo stared as the sea gull, predictably, didn’t listen to him. It raised one leg. “We don’t need any fucking messenger birds. Go, bitch.”

“Read it.” Tubbo said, sprawled on the ground. “I want to know what’s important enough that one of those guys is back.”

Tommy scowled, unpinning the message. Whatever it was, it made him scowl even harder until Ranboo was quite sure he had never seen the other so angry before. Absolutely furious, the way his smile suddenly looked pinned to his face.

“It’s stupid.” Tubbo made a questioning noise and Ranboo-

He remembered feeling left out kind of when he did this before. Watching the two with their secret language. How, with the smallest noise, they knew what the other wanted. There was no dancing around, no punishment for work that wasn’t satisfactory. But now, all he felt was content.

He could see it now. How Tommy’s anger melted slightly. The questioning tone of the hum. He liked it.

“It’s an offer.” Tommy said reluctantly. “If we go to him, he can stop Schlatt from leveraging the deal.”

“Just throw it away.” Tubbo said, rolling his eyes. Ranboo shrugged under Tommy’s gaze. It was like jumping from the frying pan to the frying pan? Or the fire to the fire? Either way, it wouldn’t help them at all.

“Of course they know already.” Purpled said, shaking his head as he turned away. Ranboo watched Tubbo slump slightly. “We’ll need to move faster than. How long until the full moon you were talking about.”

“It’s the next one, just two days shy from now.” Ranboo ran the math in his head. Just short of the time when the deal would be called. If this failed, they were done. “And I may just have an idea how you can get past the mer.”

Kristin smiled, full of sharp teeth. “I heard you can summon storms.”

Under the sudden murmur as Purpled debated logistics for Dogchamp and Tubbo asked about the storms, Ranboo was the only one to see how Tommy tucked the scroll away instead of throwing it down.

He sunk his fingers into the grass and thought about the library. Hopefully, he’d have friends with him next time he visited.

Unfortunately, Tommy and Tubbo would do anything to save their friends.

I do enjoy these chapters where the pups get some chill time between kidnapping events and I get to talk about the lore I made! It's fun.

What are the mer doing? That would be spoilers.

The One That Got Away

Chapter Notes

I saw the chapter title and couldn't help myself. This was supposed to be an aftermath POV but Fundy took it over

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Fundy didn't regret taking the shopping list and bolting out the door. Okay, maybe a little bit but-

Look, it was- look it was weird, okay! He had lived alone along with his mother. And no, okay, he wasn't mad about the others staying with him but they're always around now.

And he understood! Okay! He had been the one to have an actual Mer for a parent. It wasn't like he could remember it or anything but he knew all the stories. Sally had always been very careful about that. In the beginning, she told them quietly, like she was afraid of someone hearing them. Maybe someone might have.

He could recognize the look of fear on their faces. It was the same that Sally wore, on days when the searching got too close. As early as his most fuzzy childhood memory where she carried him away from the preschool, telling him he couldn't go today.

He looked up the news article years later. Schlatt did a lot of promotional visits to preschools that year. Other news photos had pictures with Mer lurking in the crowds. He had liked to guess at which one was his dad. Maybe the one who was always covered in slime. Or the sleepy looking guy with the clout goggles and blue shirt.

But when he grew up, and the stories became bloodier, he stopped doing that.

Which was a whole lot of explanation to say that, yeah. He knew why they were staying at his house. He knew what he was getting into when he chased after them that day. They had the same look in their eyes that his mother had that day at the preschool.

Fear.

And longing.

Even with how warm it was outside, he found himself wrapping himself closer in his parka. It felt just a little bit more secure, a little bit more of a weight against the world. A shield against his thoughts.

(Sometimes, he wondered if his mother would have stayed with Wilbur if he hadn't been born. Or if they would have drifted apart eventually. Sally had not liked it when he asked

that.

Sometimes he found himself wondering what it would've been like if he had stayed with Wilbur.)

Fundy hopped up on a railing, carefully balancing as he scampered across. It let him vent some of the relentless energy under his skin, energy he couldn't vent with coding while Tommy constantly bugged him about what it meant or Purpled sniping at how he played Minecraft.

Sally had always known when he was about to explode. Maybe it was just mothers intuition or maybe it was just experience with Wilbur. He didn't like to think about which it was. Maybe it was both and he was just fooling himself.

It had always been him and his mother. From as long as he could remember, it has always been the two of them. No one else. When other kids complained about their dad assigning chores, he was hiding from his.

That was to say it was kind of a lot that there are now a bunch of people living in this house. His house. When he hadn't so much as had a sleepover before. His family had never done sleepovers. It was way too risky. It didn't seem fair to complain about all of them because after all, if it wasn't for him, they wouldn't be there in the first place.

So when Kristen said that someone needed to go get supplies, he had leapt on it. So admittedly, he had used a better way of saying it than just saying that he needed to get out of the house before he strangled Tommy or jumped out the window and sprinted down the street chasing seagulls. There are a lot of them around the house now and it was starting to grow concerning.

Admittedly, he didn't know a lot about seagulls, but this didn't seem like normal behavior.

It was tactical! Out of all of them. He was the least likely to be recognized. Tubbo had been confused about that, but Purpled had nodded, like he had understood because, well, out of all of them, he had seen Wilbur the least. He had not seen his father since, like, shortly after he was born? Ish? Sally had never given him an exact number.

It was enough that Sally didn't have any photos of Wilbur and him. It was enough that he didn't really remember the other at all.

And out of all of them, he was least likely to be an active target. Kristin needed to help set up the plan, being that she was the only person who actually knew the story in there, who could tell them when and how it would be best to set up. They also refused to tell her all the new dietary requirements of the others. Just in case.

Sally could go, but he refused that idea immediately when she suggested that. Not an option. Haha, no. Because he had seen the way that the pink haired Mer (Techno who would've been his uncle, but he didn't like to think about that) had looked at her and she arrived. They had wanted to kill her.

He didn't want his mother to become just another body on the beach. Even if they weren't really interested at this point, she still stole from them and he had a good feeling that the Mer had grudges.

The others might as well just throw themselves in the ocean. That was kind of other self-explanatory at this point. Each time they came back it was getting harder to take advantage of error after error. The Mer was starting to get more and more persistent and more and more likely to take advantage of even the slightest misstep.

And, judging by the amount of seagulls lining their street, they were starting to get annoyed. At least none of them had followed him down the street but he swore he had seen one of the seagulls do a 360° turn with their head to watch him.

None of them had bothered to argue. He was pretty sure that Ranboo had already been asleep when he left, and the others looked quick to follow. He was doing fine, the benefits of still being able to drink caffeine. Add that as reason 101 that he still didn't wanna be a mermaid.

He needed his espresso.

He stuck his tongue out at a tourist who side eyed him for checking the roofs again. Still good. He wasn't too much further from the store from now

Maybe he was in the clear, maybe even after all that Wilbur had said or the pods had done throughout the years, the other completely forgot about him in the face of, well, real pups?

Despite how twitchy he was the entire day, nothing that happened to him was out of the norm. Not until he had come home and realized that the others had gone back yet not until you got a call from Tommy asking him to come to a random beach and bring the car.

And towels

This whole 50 year moon thing cannot come soon enough for him and in all honesty? He was kind of thinking that Kristin had made it up the whole story to impress Sally, or learn more about the Mer, but did they really have a choice not to try?

Hop on the railing, jump back down onto the stairs, take them two at a time and duck under the arms of a tourist group that always hangs around the bottom waiting for a tour who he's pretty sure has never arrived on time.

Fundy knew this town like the back of his hand, every part not by the beach at least. He explored with the tenacity of someone who, well, didn't have anything better to do. And then he discovered coding in mods and his sense was not quite as well now.

But hey, he wasn't lost! He was just technically giving himself some more time to think about everything

He liked the idea of the moon even if it's more of the thought of not having to worry again but then again, it wasn't like he was sure it work on him anyways seeing as well he wasn't

really a mirror right now and it's possible that maybe the reversed curse could stop it from ever turn into one if they caught him but he wasn't sure

They were going to have to move. He wasn't sure he liked the idea of that. As much as he complained about having to live here in a town where he couldn't really show his face near the beach, and Sally looked hunted every time she had to go on a boat to the mainland, it's always been where they lived. Just them two, and that little house far from the beach, pretending that they didn't have secrets to hide from and skeletons in the closet.

He picked up his pace, nearly running down the street now. One step, two steps. He tried planning the coding for the new mod he was thinking of in his head, the one with the babies and the realistic caretaking, and it was gonna be so fun. But he couldn't quite grasp onto it, his head still spinning around and around.

They were going to have to move.

Sally had always talked about moving someday. Going to some place where no one knew their names. Where they didn't have to worry about killers in the water, where no one laughed at their fears. Places without his father.

He tugged on the zipper of his jacket, wishing he could tug it up more. Even with the anonymity of blending into the crowd, just another annoying tourist, he felt far too vulnerable.

Chill, he reminded himself. He'd gone the entire day with no weirdness at all. Honestly, it has almost been weird that it has been so chill. He hadn't really thought about it but with how Sally had described him, he was worried that Wilbur would've shown up. Made some kind of trouble but no, it was just a normal day. Unless they are luring him into a false sense of safety.

That was the kind of thinking that nearly got him diagnosed with paranoia or anxiety.

He jittered all through the trip through the store, barely able to remember what was on the list that he had been sent with. There had been a lot of important things, but he had important things to think about it, okay? He was pretty sure that he got everything anyway.

The cashier girl smiled at him and asked him how he was doing. He was really not sure how to respond to that. Last time, he had tried info dumping about the mermaids, his Twitter account nearly got deleted. He ended up walking away without saying anything, which is honestly more embarrassing.

He really needed to get a hold of himself. Years of planning for this moment, and he was already tearing himself apart. Where had his confidence- see he never had much of it in the first place, but Fundy liked to think that he had some at least, somewhere hiding.

Then, again, he hadn't really planned for going to the convenience store and buying tuna. Sally had always been more worried about near death. Kristin looks like she would prefer death over giving the boys tuna. He grabbed the fancy variety, at least let them not say that he had never done anything nice for them.

Errands done, Fundy jogged down the street and tried to pretend he wasn't still having a panic attack. He just had one more stop to make, but it wasn't one he was looking forward to at all.

It was less of a stop and more of a personal favor, but he had a good feeling that what he was going to find wasn't pleasant.

"I just want to be sure." Tubbo said. "I mean I kind of think I know what might have happened and I don't want you to tell Tommy but I want to know what or why they haven't called."

Maybe it was the way that their faces pinched. Maybe it was the way Tubbo had talked about Clem at the school like that was the first time that they had been happy with someone who wasn't Tommy, Purpled, or Ranboo.

So instead of heading home, where it is nice and safe and he didn't have to worry about people, he found himself wandering up a street he had never gone down before. Stupid Fundy.

He checked the house numbers as he drifted by, hoping he had it down right. It was a good thing that the others had stayed with them after all. The house was far too close to the beach. He would have been impressed if they had lasted the night.

It's not like it made a huge difference but those precious few minutes could mean an escape.

Even if Fundy hadn't ended up helping much during the last two incidents. He winced, nearly smacking himself with the bag when he reached up to nervously run his hands through his hair. He still couldn't shake the urge to run.

"Just a little bit longer." He said, speeding up as he walked. Just a little bit longer. He just had to do this and then he could go home and play Minecraft while the others slept.

The house itself looks almost deceptively normal. He hasn't really been quite sure what he'd been thinking of but after meeting Tubbo and Tommy, he always imagined something less of a house and more of a tornado. Something that sort of encompassed how they just acted overall.

It's almost sweet in a way, kind of old and a strange shade of yellow but the porch had two chairs on it one with the bee themed, one with the red and white pillow. Like they've been placed there to wait for some people to come back.

He wondered how long Clem had waited for them.

But as he took the stairs of the porch, he could see that something was off about the pretty picture. For one he was pretty sure that Tubbo and Tommy hadn't left the door unlocked or half open.

"Oh, this is such a bad idea." He mumbled to himself. There was no way that Tubbo would know that he had decided to just leave, right? Would the other even get mad? This practically

confirmed it. But then he thought of the look on Tubbo's face and decided that he could be just a little bit more sure.

After all, what was the worst that could happen? He was pretty sure that the Mer were all off plotting something or being evil or killing people. Why bother chasing him down when they had four others to go after now.

The door swings open easily at a touch. It felt like trespassing when he stepped inside, but Fundy pressed the feeling down, stepping inside again. Despite his more ominous thought, he didn't really see anything. It looked like a house, not like his and Sally's house with the computer on the kitchen table or the strewn around papers, but it was a home all the same.

There weren't any photos on the wall of Tubbo and Tommy but he wasn't very surprised. He was pretty sure that despite never talking about it that they hadn't lived in town for long. He would've definitely known about them.

There was no strange scent in the air, nothing of blood nor rot. If anything had happened to Clem, it hadn't happened here. Fundy shook his head, backing up towards the door. He was done. This felt weirdly like trespassing and not in a fun way. He just wanted to take the groceries home and not care about the world for a little bit.

The door clicked shut. For a moment, Fundy forgot how to breathe.

"Oh, my little champion." A lanky figure draped itself over his shoulder, a warm cheek pressing against his own. "Why don't you look more excited to see your dear father? Where's that happy little cry?"

He shouldn't recognize that voice. Fundy tries to scramble but Wilbur holds him in place with a sad little sound like Fundy had personally stabbed him in the heart. "Wrong person?" He said, eyes darting around. "Wrong house."

Too dumb. Oh fuck.

"That's a new one, mate." His eyes darted to the kitchen table that had been empty. He knew it had been empty. He had seen the empty chairs and the only marks left on the surface had been king dried paint. It had been empty.

His grandfather hadn't been sitting there, sipping tea out of a teacup that looked like it cost as much as this entire house. His uncle hadn't been sitting in a chair too small for him, flipping through a book.

The disturbing domesticity of it made Fundy reel for a moment.

"Fundy, don't you recognize your dad?" Wilbur whined. The cheek pressed closer to his and for some reason, Fundy stays rooted to the spot. He feels like a feeder fish dropped in an aquarium for the sharks. "I know it's been so long but I recognized you."

He had imagined this moment for years. Sometimes hopeful that his father had learned from his mistakes. Sometimes triumphant, imagining himself defeating the other.

Instead, he feels like a little kid with their hand in the cookie jar.

“I really don’t-“

“Fundy Salmen.” It had been a funny joke, that last name. It didn’t quite seem as funny as Philza read it out of his school file. “Single mom, right age, and well-“

He looked at Fundy, raising an eyebrow. Fundy winced. Outside of the red hair, Sally told he took far too much after Wilbur to be hidden well. “You need to take better care of your curls.” Wilbur said with a huff. “I know exactly how to fix that.”

“They don’t need fixing.” Fundy said, breathing quicker now as he tried to shake Wilbur off. He had to get out of this house. He brought the groceries up, and Wilbur reared back with a yelp as the plastic bag smacked him, snacks scattering across the floor.

He made it one step towards the door before large arms scooped him off the floor. Fundy screamed, hand going for the fireworks in his pocket but a large hand intercepted his, squeezing until they fell to the floor.

“Relax.” Techno huffed, large hand swatting any struggle away before it could even start. “Relax.” He repeated as Fundy began to shake and he huffed like he was disappointed.

No one knew where he had gone but Tubbo who was planning to sleep. No one knew where to look. He had no magic, and the fire crackers he had were lying just out of reach.

“I’m not one of you.” Fundy said, the words jumping to his tongue as his clever tongue deserts him in his panic.

He wasn’t a pup. When the water hit him, nothing happened other than a miraculous change to Wet Fundy and a look reminiscent of a soaked fox.

“You will be.” Philza said, standing. Wilbur makes a happy chirping sound, leaning over Techno until Fundy is squashed between them. “Just as you were supposed to be.”

And then Wilbur started to sing softly, a slp and sweet lullaby like something you would sing over a cradle and Fundy had a split second of realization.

“That’s where I knew your voice from.” He said fuzzily before slumping over to the sound of a cheery laugh and warm arms holding him close as a cheek presses against his. He knew there was something bad about listening to the singing but he was just-

Really tired all of the sudden. Maybe it was just a bad dream.

It was honestly really fun writing the differences between him here and in Snow King (and yes, Fundy always gets his own interlude chapters. No, I don't play favorites. Lies.) In Snow King, he's more jaded by the Fae lifestyle and paranoid after a life of running. Sally has been gone since he was young. Here, he's still paranoid but he barely knows the Mer outside stories and he's been raised with a semi normal childhood. It's a marked difference and one I enjoyed exploring in his thoughts.

Fire and Ice

Chapter Notes

Finally back on the plot path! I'm excited to go down this road and this was a fun chapter. Some humor, some fluff, and some fear. Perfect!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Tubbo, wake up.”

Someone grabbed his shoulder, shaking him violently. Tubbo let out a groggy murmur, reaching back to swat at them. “Back off Tommy.” He mumbled.

Couldn't Tommy see he was sleeping here? So rude. He should put wet paint under his pillow again. Tubbo rolled over, trying to go back to sleep and settle back into more peaceful dreams.

Another shake, stronger this time. “Tubbo, Fundy's missing. You need to wake up right now.”

Fundy? What about Fundy? Tubbo buried his head in the pillow, turning the thought over in his mind. Why the heck would his mind be so worried about Fundy being missing? Was this some kind of weird dream thing?

Whatever-

An immense weight slammed down on his back. “RISE AND SHINE BIG T, IT'S TIME FOR CRIME.”

Tubbo jolted up with a pained yelp, rolling to grab Tommy and push him onto the floor. He doesn't stop, using instinct to roll off on top of him, landing on his stomach and making Tommy wheeze.

“What the fuck, why are you so bony.”

“I've been stealing bones from Ranboo while he sleeps.” Tubbo said, head butting Tommy. Serves him right for waking him up. He thought the other had long since learned his lesson! Wait. Why would Tommy, who either stayed up all night or slept in, be awake before him?

And why was it night and not morning? They had bunked down in Sally's office with camp beds and sleeping bags with the goal of sleeping through to the morning, all of them absolutely exhausted. The frantic swim back had taken up the last of their energy.

“I think I need my bones.” Ranboo said plaintively from the doorway. Tommy scoffed, shoving Tubbo off. Tubbo rolled with the motion, bouncing to his feet with ease. This wasn't

the first time that they had played this game.

“Don’t be ridiculous, he’s clearly stealing them from your spine.” Tommy said, rolling his eyes. Ranboo opened his mouth, paused, and then nodded slowly. Good guy.

“Get in here!” Tubbo stiffened at the loud cry from the living room, meeting Ranboo’s eyes. The other shrugged, a bit helplessly. He had never heard Sally sound so angry before. Or so incredibly afraid.

Had the Mer decided to make another attempt?

Tommy yanked on his hand, pulling himself up to his feet. “Don’t ask me, they just asked me to get you up. You sleep like a rock.” He said. Tubbo elbowed him gently, making Tommy laugh. “It’s true!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Tubbo said archly. A rock? Him? Perish the thought.

Even the half hearted joke couldn’t distract him from the fear brewing in his stomach. Tubbo nudged his way past Ranboo, trying his best to stay in front of the others. If the Mer were back, he didn’t want them to reach them.

Just outside the door, Purpled slouched against the wall, looking almost annoyingly awake. Tubbo, who still felt half asleep, felt an instinctual surge of hatred at the thought.

But his attention was quickly distracted by her.

Sally paced back and forth in front of Kristin like a caged tiger. Idly, she swung a knife back and forth in a hypnotic motion as if slashing at invisible enemies. “Fundy hasn’t returned.” She said, looking up with wild eyes. “It’s been three hours.”

And at that moment, he could see it. Not the tired marine biologist or the researcher of the last few days. But the kind of woman who fought Wilbur and his pod and won her son back with nothing but fury and a knife. And then kept him safe for years. And despite his worry, he felt a sudden surge of longing.

Fundy is really lucky, something quiet murmured in his mind. To have a parent who’d do that for him.

“The market is barely a twenty minute walk at best. With foot traffic.” Purpled said, staring down at a knife in his hands. Tubbo spun the numbers in his mind, frowning as he turned over Purpled’s unsaid message.

That didn’t work out. Even if Fundy really took his time with the shopping, there was no way it would take him three hours. Two, maybe if you added the second errand-

“I’ve called him four times.” Sally said, staring down at the knife. “He hasn’t answered any of them.”

“He could have gone to ground.” Kristin said, sipping at a cup of tea before placing it back down. “The news hadn’t reported anything like a kidnapping or a murder in the nearby market. They’ve only just stopped giving live updates on the beach.”

Tubbo exhaled quickly, glancing at the others with wide eyes. Ranboo had flinched but he wasn’t panicking again which was good. It let Tubbo focus on his thoughts.

It didn’t make any sense. How could they have taken Fundy away without a struggle?

He wouldn’t have chosen to go. As soon as he saw Sally’s grief and rage, he knew that he wouldn’t. Fundy loved Sally as much as she loved him and considering Sally was now putting more knives into her jacket, he was pretty sure the other would have fought. He wouldn’t have buckled and let a Mer just take him away, even if it was his father.

Granted, Fundy was built like a feral fox that liked to raid trash cans, but he had heard the other scream! At the very least, someone should have noticed if he went missing near a public space!

Unless, he didn’t. Tubbo felt icily cold. Unless he had gone to some place that wasn’t public as part of a stupid little sleepy plan to get Tommy a little closure.

“He would answer the phone if it was me.” Sally said firmly, spinning again to pace back across the floor. “I raised him better than to miss my calls at a time like this.”

“But if they caught him at the market or along the way, the news would know.” Kristin reminded her. “This isn’t like the pups. They can’t just sweep him into the water and disappear.”

Tubbo opened his mouth, ready to reveal the plan before abruptly wheezing as a sharp elbow jabbed him in the stomach. “They could have threatened him.” Purpled drawled, surveying the room. “Maybe someone should go retrace his steps.”

“It’s too dangerous.” Kristin refuted as she stood up from her chair. But Sally was already heading to the door. “Honestly, Sally, you know it’s a bad idea-“

Tubbo tried again, stepping back just before the elbow could hit him. Purpled glared at him from the corner of his eye. What the fuck was his problem? Why couldn’t he talk right now?

“He’s my son! I’m not leaving him out there.” Sally yelled, spinning around. “I’m not going to let them kill him with that stupid pool!”

“Sally-“

Purpled turned, roughly shoving them all back inside the room. “You argue, we’re going to talk about Mer stuff.” He called back over his shoulder. Judging by the raised voices, neither of them had noticed their disappearance.

“Careful, bitch.” Tommy’s arms wrapped around him from behind, easing a fall into a stumble. “What the fuck got into you? Shouldn’t we be trying to figure out what happened to Fundy.”

“I think I know.” Tubbo said, bouncing from foot to foot. He winced at their expectant looks. There was a soft click as the door shut behind Purpled. “It was just a small little plan, nothing should have happened! I was tired and stressed and I wasn’t thinking and you just seemed so unhappy-“

A hand covered his mouth. “Big T, breath.” Tommy said, leaning against him. Tubbo shuddered slightly, not sure he could but he tried anyway. For Tommy.

“I guessed you knew.” Purpled said with a huff, glaring at the door. Behind it, she could hear Sally yelling something about ‘murdering that guy when she had the chance’. “Spill. We’ll deal with it.”

“Shouldn’t we tell them as well? Why hide?” Ranboo said softly. Tubbo tilted his head, considering. There were a few good reasons as to why they should hide but he could guess which one Purpled had seen back in the living room.

“You think it won’t be safe to tell them if they think it’s my fault.” Tubbo said. Purpled’s eyes met his before flickering away again. One day, the other would tell them everything that happened with Punz. But today was probably not that day because Purpled was still holding a very sharp knife.

“I think.” Purpled said. “Sally is under a lot of stress. And I’ve done a lot of bad things for money so I know that she can probably do worse if she thinks we got her kid caught by his ass of a dad.”

Tubbo chewed on his lip pensively. It was true. Terribly so, but true. He didn’t know Sally well and what he did know was that she had chosen years hiding over giving up her son and that she’d murder Wilbur given half a chance. He’d been screwed over by a lot of adults throughout his life, adults he had known for far longer than he had known Sally.

“What did you even ask Furry to do?” Tommy said curiously as he flopped down onto the makeshift camp bed. “I can’t think of anything bigger than school maybe, and fuck, I’m not doing the homework due anyways.”

Tubbo shuffled slightly, ducking his head. “I asked him to see about checking in on Clem.” He said softly. “I know our phones got killed but-“

But he had wanted just a bit of closure for him and Tommy. Clem hadn’t been, like, the classic parent? But they had been nice and fairly reasonable and it had been a house he could have seen them staying in until they aged out. He wanted to know what had happened to them, why they hadn’t texted them since that last goodbye.

Tommy let out a soft sigh. “It’s not a big deal, big man.” He said, head landing on Tubbo’s shoulder. Tubbo let himself sink into the warmth.

“It is.” Tubbo insisted. “After all, we need to have some place to go after this is over.”

Once the Mer left them alone, he was firm on that. They were going to have to have someplace safe to go. Or at least enough time for him to rig up some false identities.

“Either way, I don’t think it matters.” Purpled said, shaking his head. “I think we can likely assume that those guys snared Fundy either at the house or on the route there. What matters now is what we’re going to do next.”

“Next? We’re going to help him right? Or at least try to tell Sally somehow?” Ranboo said, glancing in between them. Tubbo shrugged slowly.

He liked Fundy but he couldn’t quite tell yet if he liked him enough to risk himself like this. To risk Tommy, Purpled, and Ranboo. Call him cold, but he had to be. Somebody had to make sure that they all stayed safe.

“It’s dangerous and I’m not paid enough.” Purpled said, more brutal than he was. “We’re dancing on the edge as it is, trying to keep out of reach of the Mer before the next full moon.”

“I don’t fucking-“ Tommy huffed. “They’re all bitches.”

“No.” Ranboo said and there was an odd whistling quality to it that made something in the back of Tubbo’s head sit up and take notice. “We’re going to help him. He would and has done the same for us and look, I know he’s not the best and sometimes he does things like let other people get thrown into water despite their fear of it and then never explains anything and anyways, the point I’m trying to make is he’s a good person who doesn’t deserve to be left with them. So we’re going.”

He folded under their looks. “...If that’s alright.”

“Damn bitch. Guess Tubbo didn’t take all of your spine.” Tommy said. He glanced at Tubbo. “How likely is it that he’s still alive?”

“High.” Tubbo said. “He’s a lower target than us, but I don’t think they wouldn’t still try. Their reaction to us proved that they’re incredibly excited by the possibility of gaining more pups and right now, Fundy has a theoretically very high chance of surviving the process. Killing him would defeat the purpose. It wasn’t like us before where we were random unknowns with low possibilities of theoretically changing.”

They turned to Purpled.

“Pay me for this.” He demanded. Ranboo slowly nodded. “Fine. Right now, he’s still on the island. Boat traffic is shut down and Fundy’s human, which means they won’t try to move him yet most likely. But I give it only two more hours before the night fishing boats revolt and slip out.”

“Right. So, right now, my plan is built on the premise that it’s Wilbur, Phil, and Techno who has him. Sally seemed to think it was them and it seems the most likely? They would have the highest motivation to move him up in the target list.” He could be wrong which was making his nerves jangle, but it didn’t sound like they had time to consider the other pods.

“I can vouch for the, uh, boat thing.” Ranboo said. “Other than Mako and the mainland, there’s not really many other places to go.”

“On the island then.” Tubbo considered that. “Have we- do they even have a house here?”

Ranboo let out a little hysterical giggle at that. “Could you imagine seeing Wilbur or Techno buying a house?”

Even Purpled cracked a small smile. “I feel like for some of the Mer showing up, they would just give them the house.” he said, shaking his head. “It’s worth a try, even if we don’t know where it is. Presumably, they do? I know the mayor has one. I don’t have any information on them but I do have a list of the richer neighborhoods-”

“It’s on Wavecrest. House 36 on that street.” Tubbo turned to him and his heart dropped. Tommy was meeting their gazes, staring down at the floor instead. That was never a good sign when it came to him. What had he missed? Did Tommy not feel safe telling him about something?

“...How do you know that?” Purpled said. He dodged Tubbo’s elbow but Tubbo glared at him anyways. Tommy did not deserve that sort of suspicious tone right now! He wouldn’t have done anything to endanger them.

“It was on the offer note, wasn’t it?” Ranboo said. “I saw you read it.”

Tubbo inhaled quickly. He had never wanted his choices to affect the others. He had only wanted them to stay safe. But if Tommy made his own choices... “Tommy-”

“It doesn’t matter how I know, only that I know where they are.” Tommy said stubbornly. “I, fuck, we can talk about it later, of fucking course. But right now, let’s deal with this. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“You shouldn’t hide things like that.” Purpled said, his violet eyes dark. “What would have happened if you actually went? You need to think things through before you drag all of us down with you.”

“Pot calling the kettle black there.” Tommy said with a scoff. “Who had a full on breakdown when they met up with the mer? Not the big man here.”

Purpled’s face pulled into a snarl, his teeth looking oddly sharper. Tubbo elbowed him again, catching Tommy with the other arm. “No more arguing.” He said firmly. “If you remember the address, we can head out right now. But we’re not going to be arguing all the way there.”

“Watch me.” Tommy said. Tubbo elbowed him affectionately. “Fuck, are you putting your extra bones into your elbows or something?”

“Where else would they go?” Tubbo teased. He trotted over to the window, sliding it open. It was a first story house so the only risk of hopping out would be avoiding the few rocks littering the grass outside. There was a small concrete divot filled with water but it looked only to be a problem if they were trying to climb in, based on the angle. Pretty optimal escape in his opinion!

He put his hands on the windowsill, easily swinging up and out over the divot. The grass cushioned his feet, only the tiniest crunch letting his presence be known. The bright moonlight lit what the streetlamps wouldn't touch and Tubbo took a few steps forward, peeking out into the front yard.

He couldn't see anyone for now, but that didn't mean they weren't there. Being out in the open like this made the fish part of him sit up and take notice, tugging at him to return to somewhere more enclosed. Safer, he guessed. Fuck that.

There was a soft thump as Ranboo hit the ground and stumbled, nearly running into Tubbo. "Careful, big man." Tubbo whispered, letting his weight counterbalance so that Ranboo could push himself back up. "What would you do without me?"

"Fall, probably?" Ranboo said, ducking his head. He darted a glance back- Tommy and Purpled were whisper arguing over by the door. But no paint had come out and Tommy wasn't trying to bite him so it must not be too serious. Though that may be because Purpled was still holding a knife.

"Tubbo, about Clem-" Tubbo exhaled slowly, shaking his head.

"Not a big deal, big man. It is what it is." It wouldn't be the first foster parent who up and disappeared on them. Definitely the weirdest circumstances though.

Ranboo didn't seem to believe that, his face twisting for a moment before he looked away. "You always have a home with me." He offered shyly. "My parents won't notice other people in the house anyways and it would be nice to have company."

"You're going to regret that." Tubbo said cheerily, beaming up at him. Poor choice, big man. "I give you two weeks."

"I won't." Ranboo said and for a moment, he thought he could see through the sunglasses before Ranboo looked away again, leaving Tubbo feel like someone had abruptly punched him in the stomach. He couldn't really decide if he liked the feeling at all, all raw and vulnerable until it felt like Ranboo had to see all of his feelings spilling across the grass.

There was a muffled curse as Tommy fell to the grass, rolling away just before Purpled hopped out, far neater this time. "Door's jammed." Purpled said as he came closer. "They're still arguing but I jammed the door just in case. That'll slow them down if they check on us."

"You mean that I jammed the fucking door." Tommy said triumphantly, bouncing back to his feet and dodging a kick from Purpled.

"Yeah, sure, whatever." Purpled said, rolling his eyes. "I know where that house is. It's a good walk from here but we could use the backroads."

"Definitely not." Tubbo rejected the idea immediately. How could that be a good idea? The speed would not be worth the danger at all. "We're risking being out this late already. There's no way that we could take the likely empty back route."

“So be it. This way.” Purpled said, turning and heading down the street.

Despite his misgivings, the walk was almost eerily quiet. There were the tourists of course, even with it being late at night, plenty of people were still darting from shop to shop or staggering down the street. Nothing seemed to stop the local economy with lights still gleaming in every shop and nervous cashiers stocking the register. For a moment, he thought he saw what could have been Michael, the other just glancing out the window of a restaurant. Only for a moment as he had to rush ahead to keep up with the crowd.

No, Tubbo was thinking of the Mer. With every bit more of distance, it felt like someone was beating his heart like a drum. Where were they? Why hadn't they shown up yet? Despite the chaos of earlier, it seemed odd that no one had been watching them or hadn't noticed them on the move.

But perhaps he was overthinking it? Maybe he was letting his planning get to his head again. It was possible that Schlatt was still distracting the other pods or they were busy licking their wounds after a fight. There weren't even any seagulls around anymore.

But still. The absence of danger felt almost jarring by now. He kept expecting someone to loom out of a doorway and go for them. Only Tommy's constant chatter filled the air and Tubbo couldn't bring himself to do more than hum along and nod at the right moments. He tried, he really did, but he couldn't talk or his panic would slip out.

Had they really given them the slip? Or was this some kind of trap? The trap was possible. After all, they were walking to the house of one of the mer pods. It was completely likely for this to be a trap. But he couldn't shake the fear.

As they drew further into the neighborhoods, the scenery changed to dark houses, only a handful still lit. People changed from classic tourist gear to jogging clothes.

It didn't take much longer before Purpled drew to a stop. “It's not much farther after this.” He said, slipping his hands into his pockets. “Just another block down.”

Tubbo peeked a look ahead. “It's surprisingly homey.” He said. Big, but not a mansion like he had expected. White picket fence, a big tree with a rope swing, even a cute little wicker couch on the front porch. Then again, Wilbur and Philza hadn't looked like killer mermaids either. Though, Techno? He looked the part. “I'm going to check through the windows. You guys hang back.”

He wasn't surprised by Tommy's automatic ‘fuck no’, what was surprising was how it echoed. Purpled refused to meet his eyes but Ranboo at least made an attempt. “It's tactics.” Tubbo said. “I'm tactically sized. And if this is a trap, they'll only snare one of us and you can get me out.”

It was the smartest idea and he was already stepping forward, knowing that the others wouldn't follow him. And if they did, he'd make sure that they wouldn't. In all of his plans, none of them were acceptable pawns.

“True but I don’t have to fucking like it.” Tommy scowled. “If they get you, I’m going to kill everyone.”

“I can’t wait to see it.” Tubbo agreed. It felt like second nature to slip along the round, drawing upon all of his experience sneaking around in the past. When he glanced back, he could see the three of them, half hiding in a bush at the side of the road. Further down the street was darkness and he could tell if there was a flicker of movement or he was going crazy.

Focus. He slipped along to the house, slinking up the lawn. He couldn't see any motion detectors in the grass but he kept his steps light and quick, slinking up to the dimmed windows. The first was a bust, showing only an immaculate dining room. The second, he darted out of sight as stealthily as he could because that was Techno reading in an overstuffed chair with stupidly weird glasses.

What kind of Mer had reading glasses?

But the third was a jackpot. In both good and bad. When he slipped by, through a crack in the curtains, he could see Wilbur lounging on what had to be a fainting couch, his lips moving slightly. And on his lap was a figure with a familiar shock of nearly orange hair, unmoving as Wilbur combed his fingers through orange curls.

Right. That was bad. He beat a quick retreat back down the street, practically flinging himself into Tommy’s laugh who stoically took it which was to say, with a lot of complaining. “I think they also drugged Fundy. Possibly with Wilbur’s singing thing. But he’s there. I also saw Techno but there’s no sign of Philza.”

Which wasn’t a guarantee that he was there but with every window he checked, the risk of being seen grew. At some point, a trade off had to be made and he was going to have to make it right now.

“Is this the point where we call Sally?” Ranboo asked. Tubbo shook his head.

“They’ll kill her.” He pointed out as he shook his head. “Techno’s there too and he hates Sally from what you told me. But they won’t kill us. Not to mention, we don’t have time to get there and back before boat travel opens up and we don’t know if they’ll move him then. So, here’s what we’re going to do-”

If he was ever charged in a court of law, Tubbo would argue that if they didn’t want people throwing a paint bomb through someone’s back door, they wouldn’t have made the lock so easy to pick.

But that didn’t make it easier to stand in the yard as Techno slammed through the door, blood red eyes glowing in the moonlight.

“Sup. I’m here for your kneecaps.” Tubbo said, trying to ignore the fishbrain screaming in the back of his head as he tossed another paint bomb up and down. Behind Techno, two shadows slinked along the porch, disappearing inside the house.

Techno's hands flexed as he stepped closer, dark pupils blown so wide that Tubbo could see them with only the moonlight. "Orpheus."

For some reason, he was pretty sure there wasn't a court out there that would charge him for this.

Chapter End Notes

Me? Throwing in a reference to another fanfic? I would never.

Hocus Pocus

Chapter Notes

Tubbo hates it when a good plan goes wrong.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Did you forget my name already?” Tubbo said, trying for confidence that he doesn’t really feel. Back straight, eyes forward, but as Techno steps forward, he can’t help the slight shiver.

Even knowing the plan and knowing Techno wouldn’t hurt him, the other looked easily capable of snapping him in half. If even one thing went wrong, he didn’t see himself winning this fight.

But that was-the best kind of plan.

"It's more fitting." Techno said, prowling forward Tubbo kept one eye on him, trying to calculate how far he could distract him.

“For a pretentious Latin guy?” Tubbo said, rolling his eyes. He couldn’t help it. What kind of fucking guy gave a pretentious nickname like Orpheus?

“Greek, actually. Orpheus, the man who tried to steal his wife away from their rightful rest. Only to fail and join her down there.” Techno said. Another step forward as Tubbo stepped back, his heart beating rabbit quick. “What does Tubbo stand for, that fits more than that?”

“Tuberculosis.”

“Heh?” Techno said and Tubbo got to gleefully watch as that pretentious facade broke, red eyes becoming wide. “Bruh. No, it doesn’t.”

“Are you saying you know more than my birth records?” Tubbo said. He could feel the cool wood of the fence against his back as he stepped back again. Overhead, the moon glimmered, a merciless witness.

“That wasn’t in your birth records.” Techno said, shaking his head. For a moment Tommy frowned because how- then cold water splashed down his spine.

“You looked at our birth records?” Tubbo said, shoulders drawing up defensively. “How did you even get those? Why would you even get those?”

Too late, he knew he stepped into a trap as that smug predator look appeared again. “Why wouldn’t we?” Techno drawled. “Do you think it’s hard? Major L, get good.”

He was going to strangle him. He was actually going to strangle him or bite him and he'd get punted into the ocean but gods, would it feel good before then. "Those aren't widely available." Tubbo defended, resisting the urge to glance at the house. How much longer was it going to take?

"They are if you want to adopt someone." And wow, there was that cold water down the back again. Had Technoblade's teeth always been quite so sharp? "Dadza went all mother hen and wanted to get everything."

"We're already in a foster home! Ranboo and Purpled have families! You can't honestly tell me they decided you were going to adopt us!" Tubbo said, barely resisting the urge to yell. The fishbrain quailed, wanted to stay quiet but Tubbo gritted his teeth, fueling the fire of anger higher.

Channel Tommy, he told himself. Channel Tommy without his precious coke for three days. He needed to be feral, not cute calm Tubbo everyone trusted because Techno didn't care about trusting him.

Also, feral Tubbo got to bite people. Motivation! It took everything he had to stand still as the other drew closer.

"Purpled's family are never even around and do you really think Ranboo's family will care if we take him away? With a hefty enough donation, they won't even notice." Techno drawled. Oh, his teeth were definitely sharper, his hands looking more like claws. "And your foster parent resigned."

"What did you do to them?" Tubbo said, his right hand balling into a fist. So tight that he could feel his nails dig into his palms and saw Techno's eyes widen as blood began to flow. It kept him firm, rooted to the ground when he wanted to lunge, the pain bringing sharp clarity to the panic the fishbrain wanted.

"Have you ever heard of a dog going to a farm upstate?" Techno said, rocking back slightly. His pink hair fell to the side as his head tipped, red eyes filled with darkness. Tubbo sucked in a quick breath, his heart feeling like it fell to his knees.

"They were a good person."

"They were in the way." Techno said, another step and he was close enough to bite now. Tubbo felt him shaking with rage, ready to lunge. "They were in the way" like Clem was just an annoying fence placed where Techno wanted to go.

"For someone who wants us to trust them so much, you sure seemed to want to terrorize us." Tubbo said, tucking his hands behind his back before they could try to do something like punch Techno and disrupt this incredibly narrow balance that they had. "What else would you call murdering all those people? Hurting us?"

"Who hurt you?" Techno said, red eyes so dark they looked almost black. Tubbo nearly choked on the hypocrisy.

“You?” He said, wondering if the others could hear this bull. “You nearly broke Ranboo’s ankle! That’s the least of it!”

“Bruh, I didn’t even know he was a pup. That doesn’t count.” Techno said. Tubbo rolled his eyes. Should that matter? Wilbur had tried to kill him, unknowingly at the time, but the fear still haunted him. It was almost lucky in a way.

After all, it was hard to be lured by their offer when he remembered that dreamy night, the way he walked along the beach toward what could have been his death. That the only reason he hadn’t gone missing and Tommy stolen away was his own change.

“I-”

“How much longer are you going to stall?” Techno said. And it was aggravating how bored he sounded as he did. Tubbo’s eyes went wide, his shoulders tensing up. “I want to go in and finish my book before Wilbur gets into the sea shanties again.”

Of course Wilbur was the kind of guy who knew sea shanties.

“Right.” Tubbo said, slowly sidling along the fence and hoping that this would work and that the others had enough time now. If not, he was going to plan B. Biting. “I’ll just leave you to that then-“

A heavy hand landed on his shoulder, grinding him into the ground. “And where do you think you’re going, pup?” Techno said. “Did you really think that this little trick would work?”

“What trick?” Tubbo said, employing his most innocent of innocent faces. Wide eyed, head tilted so his curls flopped across his face, quick blinks. Perfection.

“Bruh. You paint bombed my house. And showed up here. Did you really think that you could just walk away, pup?” Techno said, leaning in. And then he made That Sound.

That Sound sucked. Because That Sound made his knees wobble, fish brain immediately flopping over and taking control as Tubbo almost swayed with the knowledge that He Had Done Something Bad and Protector Was Angry.

“Stop.” He croaked, innocence melting away and he knows he fucked up when he hears the wobble in his voice. Just the tiniest little lurch and Techno practically purrs and why was he so close now-

“Do you still feel scared?” He asked and the worst part was that no, no he didn’t. Because then Techno whistled and fish brain practically went boneless with relief that it wasn’t in trouble and that all was forgiven.

He had to think but it was so hard as Techno began to tug and it took everything Tubbo had to keep his feet dug in, making a muffled sound of protest.

“Bruh, why do you want to stay out where it’s dark.” Techno said, turning his head away to survey the rest of the yard. He made a muffled hissing noise. “Dadza’s gonna lose his mind-“

That's when the second paint bomb hit him in the face.

It was almost jarring, the sudden jump from relaxation to awakening as the cold droplets hit his face, making him automatically stumble away. Forget the tropical night, that was freezing!

Techno's hand tightened but too late as Tubbo stepped to the side, slipping out of his grip.

He couldn't help the taunting grin, beginning to scramble back as Techno claws the bright paint from his right. "You're right, red is your color." Tubbo said, before turning and clambering over the fence like a possessed monkey.

He meets Ranboo on the other side, the other almost crouched as they hunched into the shadow. "Are they done?" He whispered. Ranboo shrugged.

"I dunno man! You didn't look too good!" Tubbo groaned, grabbing his hand and pulling him into a run. It had to be close enough.

A soft clatter was their only warning and Tubbo backpedaled with wide eyes as *Techno vaulted over the fence.*

One smooth motion, one hand, up and over. He landed in a graceful crouch, the overall picture marred by the red paint streaking down his face. "Bruh." He said. "That was not what I expected when I heard you lurking behind the fence like a scared minnow."

"Of course you knew, why wouldn't you." Ranboo mumbled. Fine. This was fine. Tubbo repressed the stirrings of panic. They had guessed Techno would notice Ranboo but he would likely hold off to keep him from running until he could spring his own trap. It was a careful balance of Techno's arrogance and desire to capture them both versus his decision to take one quickly.

Him vaulting the fence? Not in his calculations.

"There was a gate?" Tubbo couldn't help saying as he turned and started sprinting the other way, hand and hand with Ranboo. Behind them came the slow, terrible thud of footsteps.

Okay, think. This was earlier than they had planned, not letting them get a headstart to lead him away but they could work with this. They weren't in a jungle but they had more resources than dealing with that jungle again and the plan to shove Techno into a pond. Perhaps, if Ranboo could find some water and he could help, they could freeze-

And beyond the fence, he could hear an angry shriek.

"TOMS. GET BACK HERE RIGHT NOW." Came a terribly familiar sound. And worse, the low hissing behind them and despite himself, Tubbo stumbled to a stop. Ranboo nearly tumbled over his own feet and he stumbled to a stop just in time.

"What are you doing, man?" Ranboo said, tugging slightly at his hand to pull him forward. "We can't just stand here!"

“He’s not going to follow us.” Tubbo hissed, turning back and his eyes went wide and horrified. Techno had stopped following them, instead turning and heading for the gate. The same gate where Tommy and Purpled were supposed to flee out of while Techno was still preoccupied with them, hopefully carrying Fundy who in a best case scenario was conscious and able to flee.

But this was not feeling like a best case scenario right now.

Worse, was the quicksilver feral grin on Techno’s face like a predator who knew prey was about to run directly into a trap.

Ranboo swore, surprisingly creatively. “This night.” He said, emotion ladening his voice as he turned back. “Do we have any more of the bombs?”

“I gave them all to Purpled.” Tubbo admitted. It had seemed like a good idea at the time as they didn’t think they could have lured more than one Mer out of the house. Two had been enough to get Techno out and then stall him. They could warn them at least but they’d still need to get another escape route for them as it sounded Wilbur was in pursuit. “We’re on our own.”

They could hear the screen door slam open and Tubbo took a deep breath. “Tommy! Purpled! Don’t go through the gate!”

Distracted with the yell, he didn’t feel the tug on his hand until it was too late as Ranboo pulled away, sprinting towards Techno. With a terrified yelp, Tubbo sprinted after him. He yanked Ranboo away just as Techno spun to grab him.

“Heh? Would you really trying to ambush me?” Techno said, the darkness flickering for a moment to reveal surprise instead. Ranboo flailed, kicking Techno in the shin, but the other didn’t even flinch.

“Leave them alone!” Ranboo said, pulling himself up to his full height for once which was surprisingly quite tall. Tubbo hated every moment of this but he kept himself rooted to the ground, trying to back Ranboo up. “Don’t touch them!”

“What do you think you can do, pups?” Techno said, gesturing at the gate. Something clattered in the yard and he could hear Tommy swearing at something. The taunting laughter of someone who did not sound like Tommy or Purpled. “Why would you even want to do something? What place waits for you after this? None of you have a family to return to, nor safety and understanding on land.”

“And whose fault is that?” Tubbo snarled. “You’re the one who got rid of Clem and stole our birth records. You’re the ones who have been killing people. It’s your fault we don’t have a family to go back to!”

“You’re both wrong.” Ranboo said, looking between them. The clattering and yelling from the yard was growing louder and Tubbo didn’t know how someone hadn’t called the police yet. “I already have a family I’m happy with.”

He squeezed Tubbo's hand. Damn it. Now he was getting sentimental.

But it worked because right as Techno was about to spit out his reply, there was a surprised yelp and Tommy and Purpled bolted out of the gate, half dragging Fundy between them. Techno turned but Tubbo moved faster, lunging to headbutt him.

There was a soft breeze as he stumbled back, just missing him. Ranboo's hood tightened, starting to drag them away as Tommy whooped, starting to scramble across the yard.

"What are you doing?" Wilbur said, looking far more messy when he appeared at the gate than when Tubbo had last seen him. Paint had been smeared over his fancy hipster coat and his beanie was gone, glasses still skewed as he surveyed them with dark brown eyes. "Aw, did you miss your hatchmates?"

"I think that's our cue to run." Ranboo whispered into Tubbo's ear, the two starting to backpedal as Techno swung to face them. Tubbo nodded back, measuring the distance and judging it to be too close.

"Why don't we just go back inside and talk about this like civilized people?" Techno said with a sigh he didn't deserve and he punched the bridge of his nose. "Aren't you tired?"

"Never better." Tubbo lied. He was, the effects of being a mer starting to rear its ugly head, but he would never admit that to Techno. They kept pulling away, five feet, ten feet.

He had seen Techno sprint that in less than a second. Right. Think.

"I think somebody's tired!" Wilbur said, practically bouncing on his heels as he stalked after Purpled and Tommy who were still trying to drag Fundy across the lawn. "I have a nice warm nest you can take a nap in."

"Fuck you!" Tommy howled back.

Fundy was trying, he could see that in the way the other tried to keep his feet under him but kept stumbling, his head hanging low. Whatever they had done to him, it wasn't wearing off fast.

"Maybe we can talk our way out." Tubbo said, half to himself as he watched Wilbur follow after the other pair, Techno turning to face them. This really didn't look good. If they dropped Fundy, they might be able to make a break for it but what was the point of that anyways?

They came here to fix a mistake he had made. No matter how it may have made their lives easier to leave him, they had agreed and this was what was happening. They couldn't just break it now.

"What do you have to say, Orpheus?" Techno said, and there was barely a flicker before their meager lead was gone. Ranboo yelped, the air chilling for a moment before it faded just as fast, Tubbo having to act fast to steady the other. "Or is Lethe planning some clever trick?"

"I could offer-" And Ranboo squeezed hard, shaking his head firmly.

“You’re not offering that.” He said. “Stop making the deals, man. We’re not going along with them even if you try.”

“But-“ Tubbo said, half stopping. What else did they have? Techno’s hissing sounded incredibly smug as he hovered over them, the fish brain was practically beginning to find a small space to hide in, and his other friends being followed as they tried to escape. “A game then?”

“A game. Bruh.” Techno said, tilting his head to the side as he folded his arms. “A game? You really want to try that right now?”

Ranboo’s hand tightened in warning but Tubbo shook his head, continuing. “If you win, we’ll go with you.” He offered.

“You’ll go with us anyways.” Techno said, blandly. “Unless one of you has a different ability, you’re trapped here.”

He heard Tommy snarl behind them, Purpled spitting something that sounded vaguely illegal. And louder. When he glanced back, the other two were getting herded back across the lawn by a triumphant looking Wilbur.

“Willingly.” Tubbo said. “I- Can we talk alone for a bit? Not you. The others.”

Techno scoffed, opening his mouth. But a new voice came in, crisply interrupting him. “Aw, let them, mate.” Philza stood in the gateway, green robe casually thrown on despite the warmth of the night. He smiled when he saw Tubbo but Tubbo didn’t smile back. “What’s the harm?”

“I could list several things.” Techno said. Philza pointed past him. “Bruh.”

“But daaaaad-“ Wilbur’s whine cut off as Techno grabbed his arm, dragging him into the fenced backyard. “Techno, why are you always so meaaaaan-“

Philza’s smile didn’t waver. “Five minutes, pups.” He said. But he didn’t move from the gate.

Tubbo sighed, turning to the others. He’d take what he could get. “I have an idea.” He said. “But it’s risky.”

This close, he could see Fundy was even worse than he had been expecting. Maybe Wilbur’s song was stronger over a longer period of time? Or worse for non Mers? Either way, the other still looked pretty out of it, struggling to focus his gaze on Tubbo.

“As risky as sneaking into that stupid house was?” Purpled said with a scoff. But he didn’t turn away and that counted for something. “What is it?”

“A game.” Ranboo said before Tubbo could. He glanced at Tubbo, wide eyes curious. “And if we lose, we go with them?”

“What the fuck, Tubbo? How does that help?” Tommy hissed. Tubbo shrugged, throwing his hands up.

“What else do we do?” He said. “I’d offer myself but apparently, I’m not allowed to.”

“I could-“

“If I don’t get to use myself as a martyr, no one does.” Tubbo hissed. “With a game, we at least have a chance of getting out of this. Because right now, does anyone see a way we could get away from them?”

Maybe during the day when they were fresh and Fundy was awake. Maybe if they weren’t running on stolen sleep and bodies that felt suddenly foreign.

But the more he stood there, the more alluring the part of his mind he knew to be corrupted by the Mer influence. That said that this territory was claimed and safe, that he couldn’t fight Techno. That the nest Wilbur offered sounded nice and safe for his tired friends (nestmates).

That he was getting really tired of running. But he refused to go down without a fight.

“I think he’s right.” Purpled said. He shrugged, making Fundy grumble. “I doubt they want any other bargaining chips and we can’t keep gambling on putting them against the other mers. Even if we run, they have a car and it’s open road around here which they probably knew when they picked this house. What we lose in a game is what we’re losing anyways.”

“Thank you.” Tubbo said. It was good to have just a little reassurance to his sparking anxiety that he had calculated this wrong. This entire night had gone wrong. Techno shouldn’t have jumped the fence so quickly, he shouldn’t have even stopped the conversation so quickly, and Wilbur should have been incapacitated by the sound and blinding of the paint bombs, allowing the others to flee. They’d lure Techno for a ways before using his magic and Ranboo’s ice ability and the pool of a house a few blocks down to flee.

“I’m not saying it’s a good idea.” Purpled emphasized. “If they even accept, we’re playing poker in a room with the lights off and the dealer has a loaded deck.”

Tubbo nodded. That, he knew. He looked at Tommy, meeting scared blue eyes. The other slowly shook his head. “If you think it’s a good idea, Tubso.” He said. I trust you, were the unspoken words and Tubbo tried to pretend like his shoulders weren’t about to buckle under the weight.

“Alright. We can do this.” Ranboo said. “If you know what you’re doing.”

“Probably not.” Tubbo mumbled. He turned back to face Philza, meeting that maddeningly amused gaze. “We want to play a game.”

“What kind of game?” Philza said. A seagull landed on his shoulder. “What do you have to offer that outweighs us just taking you right now?”

“For one, I’ll bite you.” Tubbo said. He pretended like he couldn’t see Techno and Wilbur peeking out from behind Philza. “It’s similar to what I offered Schlatt but broader. We’ll go willingly. No more fighting the instincts or you.”

“Tempting.” Philza said. “But what would be your terms?”

“An hour head start.” Tubbo said. “If we make it back to Sally’s house before you catch us, you leave us alone till the next full moon.”

“Five minutes.”

“What, don’t think your old man bones have a chance?” Tommy scoffed and Philza spluttered, shoulders shaking.

“I’m not that old!” He protested. Behind him, snickering wafted through the air.

“Ancient. Practically dust already.” Tommy taunted. And despite his attempt at professionalism, Tubbo couldn’t help the snort that slipped free. “I could crush your skull with a sneeze, that’s how old it is.”

“You little shits.” Philza said and for a moment, Tubbo froze. There was such fondness in it. Like for a moment, Philza wasn’t the murderer hunting them but a fond parent with a bunch of misbehaving kids.

Tubbo promptly shoved that thought in a box and padlocked it. Fuck that. “Twenty minutes.” He said. Still a solid lead though they would be heavily slowed by Fundy. “We’re playing with handicaps compared to you.”

Philza tilted his head to the side, strangely birdlike under the moonlight. “So be it.”

“Right then, so we’ll be-“

“Don’t I get to make my own conditions?” Philza’s voice cracked through the air like a hiss and Tubbo froze. Even the fish brain was silent, like even a thought would be noticed, all senses urging him to freeze.

“If reasonable.” Tubbo said, guarded. “You can’t sabotage us.”

“Nah, mate. This isn’t sabotage.” How had he not seen how dark Philza’s eyes were before? “If the other pods show up, you don’t take their help. You don’t send them our way and you avoid them. If you escape, it has to be by yourselves, little pups. Show us that independence you say you have.”

That- was an incredibly bad idea. It’s not like he liked the other pods but the chaos of their fights had been an easy way to flee before. “You can’t-“

“Say no, and you go to the nest right now.” Philza said, cutting through his words like a claw. “I’m being very nice to you even after you were little shits who paint bombed my house. And if I’m going to play your game instead of letting Wilbur sing you to sleep and take you to the nest I made where Techno can guard you, then I’m getting my own terms. None of the intruders.”

His spine felt like it had turned to ice. “Fine.” Tubbo said, feeling Ranboo squeeze his hand.

“Twenty minutes. And then we’re hunting. Have fun, mates.”

Chapter End Notes

It was really fun to read y'all's guesses on what would happen! In Tubbo's defense, it was a very good plan, he just underestimated the fact that Techno is actually Wilbur's brother and therefore, incredibly dramatic!

It probably would have worked before but Techno is in full 'idiot Pups Need An Adult' mode now. Which worked out because he thought Ranboo was hiding, not hiding to paint bomb him.

I am incredibly excited to write this game.

Pressure Cooker

Chapter Notes

This is gonna be a two parter!

I enjoyed the contrast between this game and the one in Snow King because while they're similar people, they grew up in very different worlds and with different rules to play by. Which leads to different choices, different outcomes, and a lot of fun for me!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Purpled had run more in the past weeks than he had run in his entire life. He gritted his teeth, Fundy's weight shifting awkwardly as they fled down the street. Behind, he could hear crazed laughter from Wilbur.

"Can I state that this was a bad idea?" Purpled said, breath coming quick pants. Tommy spluttered, nearly stumbling as they ran.

"You voted for this, you fuck!" He yelled. Purpled rolled his eyes.

"I can vote for it and still think it's a bad idea!" He said. Honestly. He had thought this entire night was a bad idea from the very moment they had lobbed a paint bomb into Wilbur's room and he dodged the worst of it. Hazard pay. He wanted so much hazard pay.

Honestly, he should just ask for a card to Ranboo's bank account at this point.

"Fuck you. Seriously. What the fuck."

"We're fucked either way." Purpled said, glancing down a side street before immediately dismissing it as an option. Rich people neighborhoods had the worst shortcuts. "Alone, we might be able to get most of the way back before the time was up but not while dragging Mr. Dream Land here."

He shook Fundy slightly for emphasis, making the other grumble. His eyes were clearer than before when he and Tommy had dragged him out of the chair, but that wasn't much of a change. Fucking hell.

"He's not awake yet?" Tubbo said, pace slowing to be even with them. "When Wilbur enchanted me, it- it wore off fast."

"Who knows why." Purpled said, trying to speed up but finding that he was still far too hampered by Fundy's dragging weight. "Could be the stupid fucking fish thing or it could have been some other reason. We've hit him and thrown water at him."

Was this how it had been like for Tommy and Ranboo that night? Trying to drag someone along who wasn't responding?

He shoved the idea away.

"I set him on fire." Tommy added cheerily. "It didn't work."

"You did what?" Ranboo hissed, stumbling. It was just a burned sleeve, honestly, the dramatics were not needed.

"Either way, he's out for who knows how long so anyone who carries him is going to be slowed down." Purpled squinted ahead, into the shadows but saw nothing. Honestly, that worried him more than anything. "We may have to split up."

"Oh, fuck no."

"That's how people die in horror movies."

"Why would that be a good plan?"

"We're not getting back in time." Purpled said coldly. Someone had to say it. "And if any of them catch up, we're fucked. Which they will because Techno runs faster, Philza has multiple spies, and Wilbur has the siren voice. Splitting up means we could at least get them to split up."

Ranboo shook his head. "But wouldn't that be lying? We told them we'd go willingly if they caught us which implies, well--"

"Fuck 'em." Purpled said brutally. There was none of the pain or shock that Tubbo had described. None of them could actually enforce the deal though he had no illusions that fighting wouldn't hold up long if they caught them.

"It's a bad plan but a good one for now." Tubbo said thoughtfully. "I mean, it's absolutely abysmal and this is how people die in horror movies. But he's right. We could at least force them to split up to track us and we might move a bit faster."

"I'm not saying it's a good plan whatsoever. And the fact that we're using it is probably meaning that we are absolutely doomed." Purpled said drily. "But this is all we have."

He sighs, looking up and down the street before slowly beginning to back away. "I think that me and Ranboo will take Fundy for now. You and Tommy could move faster."

"Won't there be more danger for you guys doing that? You'll be doubly slowed down and we don't know as much about the town as you do." Tubbo said, brow creasing in concern. "We'll be more likely to get lost."

"That's exactly why I'm suggesting it." Purpled stared at him, resisting the urge to roll his eyes. "You're probably gonna spend half the time stumbling around trying to figure out where you're going and then we will use our knowledge of the town to move faster."

“But-“

“Oh fuck this.” Tommy said, throwing his head back. “Right, you take the fox furry boy whatever and me and Tubbo will head the other direction. You’ll miss my perfect sense of direction but sucks to suck. Good luck, I guess.”

“I’m not that slow.” Ranboo mumbled under his breath. Purpled pretended that he didn’t hear him, studiously staring down the street.

It was an awkward shuffle, trying to get Ranboo to carry Fundy instead, but eventually they managed it and set off down the street.

Purpled refused to admit that it filled him with a strange sense of unease to see Tubbo and Tommy heading away from them. The voice he didn’t like to think about in his head made an odd chirping sound wanting to follow after them, to stay still, to hide. Every step felt oddly heavy.

He only liked one of those options.

He forced himself to turn away, forcing Fundy and Ranboo to back up the other way. Not far but just enough that they could backtrack up another alley. Here, the moonlight was blocked, shadows stretching along the walls, leaning a strange sense of darkness to the situation.

“How much time do you think we have left?” Ranboo said worriedly, glancing down behind them. “It couldn’t have been more than 10 minutes.”

“I’d say it’s getting up to 20 now.” Purpled said with a sigh of disgust. He had been trying to keep track in his head, but without a phone, considering that his old phone was now at the bottom of the ocean, it was near impossible. But he had a good feeling that they didn’t have much time left.

“And.” He added, “if we are able to go back on our side, it’s quite possible that they would renegade on their side. After all, how likely is it that they know that we don’t have phones or watches on us right now?”

He hated the feeling of being the watched and not the watcher, his secrets stolen away.

“Way too likely.” Ranboo said. “I liked watching stalker dramas. I’m not so much a fan of being in one.”

They quickened the pace, but it wasn’t long until he heard the cackle of seagulls in the distance. “Time is running out.” Purpled said without a frown before turning to Ranboo. “How good are you at parkour?”

“Oh, I don’t know man I never really did it.” Ranboo said, looking away from him. “Yeah I mean you think I would try to do it, but like. No, I’ve never tried it.”

“That’s a lot of words to say no.” Purpled said, rolling his eyes. “Alright, put him down and boost me up.”

He waved at the dumpster leaning against the wall. The lids were down, and provided a neat halfway point out to a windowsill. From there, he could hop up to the low roofing and pull himself up. Easy.

“Should we be doing this?” Ranboo asked. But even as he said it, he set Fundy down gently on the ground. “I mean it doesn’t seem safe to carry him and try to parkour at the same time.”

“Do you have any other ideas?” Purpled said. “They’re gonna catch us if we keep running along through the alleys. At least if we get off the road, they’ll have to climb up after us.”

Honestly, Purpled would rather just ditch Fundy and be done with it, but he knew if he did so the others would never forgive him. He hated the feeling of having to be beholden to the others, to stick by what they wanted but something kept him from acting on that plan.

Fucking fish instincts

He pushed himself along the wall, easily climbing up to the window, before reaching back down and pulling Fundy up. It was awkward and way too heavy, but Fundy was lighter than he expected and Purpled had spent many days pulling in heavy fishing nets.

Once Fundy was safely on the roof, he reached back down, holding his hand out for Ranboo. Ranboo stared at him before uncertainly glancing down the narrow alleyway. “Maybe we should split up again.” He suggested. “I’m not really a roof climber.”

Oh, fucking hell, what is he supposed to say to that? For once, he wished Tubbo was here. Tubbo seemed like he could convince Ranboo to get up here or maybe Tommy. Probably would’ve just dragged Ranboo up by now.

Purpled could not drag someone like Tommy nor convince than like Tubbo. His skills came from a different place.

He could bribe him, but that would be spending money and Purpled refused to do that.

He could leave but something kept him still on the windowsill, staring down at Ranboo. He didn’t want the other to leave now. It had been hard enough letting Tubbo and Tommy leave and he didn’t-

Ranboo was kind of like a wounded tuna. If he left, he’d probably get snapped up by something roaming the ocean. Like a shark. Or maybe a minnow

“I won’t let you fall.” Purpled said, staring down at Ranboo. It felt stupid and far too shallow, but somehow Ranboo reached out for his hand.

Well, he wasn’t gonna let himself look a gift horse in the mouth. Purpled reached down, hauling Ranboo up.

Their pace slowed even further, as they slowly made their way across the rooftops. He couldn’t bring himself to be surprised when he started hearing the seagulls circle in the distance. The crunch of someone walking through the alleyways. Fast.

The jump up had made a difference but not for long.

“How are they already catching up to us?” Ranboo said, wheezing as he tried to readjust Fundy’s weight. “We had a head start and we’re going over the rooftops.”

“I don’t fucking know and if I did. I’d do something about it.” Purpled scowled at the rooftop below them like he could break it with his mind.

He hated feeling how vulnerable he was, how even as they pulled ahead, something slowly caught up behind them. Like watching the fishing shoals try to outrun a shark.

But when he saw the blur of pink in the corner of his eyes, it was still an easy decision to push Fundy fully into Ranboo’s arms. “Make your way down to the lower levels and I’ll meet you there.” He said before turning and sprinting away, ignoring Ranboo’s scream of his name.

‘Don’t follow’, he tried to say, but it didn’t come out. Instead, Purpled threw himself into what he knew, leaping across the rooftop and sprinting towards the pink blur.

This close, it was like a beacon. He knew, even as he veered away, that he had Techno’s attention, that the other would follow.

Even as he flung himself away, his lead suddenly closed. He could feel the breeze, pressure by his shoulders as someone reached for him.

“Bruh.” They groaned. “Can’t you just come in easily? I want to get back to my book.”

He was going to rip out every secret that Techno had and sell it to the highest bidder, Purpled swore to himself. He’d strip them bare and ruin him. He was going to-

Fuck, why was this guy so fast? Purpled thought he was fast after years of working but Techno was on a whole ‘nother level.

“You owe me for this!” Purpled yelled. Purpled vaulted to the next roof, relishing in the crunch of gravel while ignoring the answering crunch behind him. He leapt to the next, and then another, trying not to look at Ranboo’s terrified visage.

But he couldn’t help it, every glance drawing him in like a magnet, even as the crunch of gravel drew closer.

None of this dumbass move would work if Ranboo chose to follow and Technoblade split after them.

But thankfully, it looked like the other was choosing to listen, slowly beginning to scramble down the building.

But Purpled forgot. In every world, as soon as he tried to care for someone, that was when reality came back to slap him in the face. So when the next jump crumbled under his feet, shoes glancing just shy of a successful landing, he couldn’t bring himself to be surprised.

Somebody screamed but it wasn't him.

He falls.

He feels how the wind rips around him as he fumbled, he can feel the edges of the wind, scattered thoughts reaching to catch himself, but too slow. He reaches, but it doesn't rise to his call. There's nothing more but the feeble tugs of desperation.

He tries to roll with it to curl up into a ball and roll like he had seen other people do when they had fallen off the docks or off of the building during construction, but that doesn't block out the crack as he hit the ground.

And then came the pain.

He feels like there is been driven out of his lungs forever and for second Purpled wondered is the fall had killed him first

He gasped, curling further in on himself, like that could hide him from the pain. Above, he thinks he can still hear screaming the garbled edges of words, but then his mind scatters to unable to cling on them.

It hurts, a steady stabbing pain. Interestingly, he can hear new sounds now chirps and keens and whines, something wholly inhuman.

He needs to get up.

He doesn't.

But something still answers.

"Oh fuck you don't look too good. Someone tries to slip their hands under him and Purpled whines, curling up further. A soothing whistle follows him, hands pulling his arms away, pulling him up.

"Leave me here to die." Purpled mutters. And then, with his hands pulled away, his eyes focuses on blurry white, and he grimaces. "Oh, I'm not paid enough for this."

"I'm not doing that." Punz dismisses. A hand smoothed over his hair. Purpled can't smother the gasp of pain as he's pulled into Punz's arms, his chin tucked awkwardly over their shoulder as Punz begins to stand. "Gods, I leave you for just a short time and you're already managing to injure yourself."

The air around them was strangely foggy, almost distorted. Purpled couldn't bring himself to focus on it, gaze narrowing back onto Punz.

"Let me go." Purpled said, beginning to thrash, his movements stuttering as the pain hit. "I thought I told you to back off and that I never want to see you again."

Punz scoffed.

“Sure, I’ll let you go and then you get taken by the brute.” He jerked his chin up, where Purpled could hear a low hiss and the clatter of gravel. “Do you really want that more than you want to deal with me? Come on, I thought we had something.”

They had nothing. They had lies, and they had deceit and they had near danger because Punz had been willing to kill him to get what he wanted.

The Brute or the Betrayer.

Not much of a choice at all.

And dammit, Purpled was tired, tired of running tired of the memory, tired of remembering how Punz betrayed him. Even as he wanted to sleep, even as part of him wanted to crawl back into Punz arms, and pretend like they were actually the brothers he said they were, that was like the partnership had been real in Punz’s mind, like Punz was someone who actually watched his back instead of been plotting against him.

“You’re hurt.” Punz said, careful hands running over him. “But not too badly. Bad bruising mostly but you should probably get a health potion.”

Purpled went for his throat but fabric blocked his bite, Punz already anticipating his move. “I don’t plan to go anywhere with you.”

“Look at it this way.” Punz encouraged. “You know me, right? Easier to escape that way.”

The word escape dripped with poison, different from Punz’s usual tone. Purpled knew him, but he wasn’t going to make escaping as easy as that.

He was tired and injured and alone, And he had no illusions that Ranboo would be able to find him in time as Punz stepped back into the shadows. Every movement echoed with pain even as Punz held him closer and tighter, pace picking up even as gory threats began to echo through the alleyway.

Whatever the fog or distortion was, it was slowing Techno but not for long and Punz knew it, picking up his pace.

Techno was still after him. Ranboo could still win this. They owed him so much.

“You set a claim and everyone ignores it.” He mumbled. And this time, Purpled couldn’t miss the shadow in those eyes as they looked at him. Scanning him for every injury, eyes usually weighing up money weighing up him instead.

“World’s smallest violin.”

He hated it.

(He missed this.)

But that didn't mean that he didn't hate how smug Punz was as he slowly went limp, pain and exhaustion stealing over him as the adrenaline faded and something cooed for him to relax, harder to ignore and lock away now.

"I'll kill you for this." Purpled snarled, curling claws into a worn (warm) white hoodie and hoping that they stabbed through. Let's see Punz get a stupid new hoodie.

The cold metal of the golden necklace pressed into his cheek as Punz pulled him closer. "Sure, kid. I believe you."

He hoped Ranboo had gotten away.

Ranboo had not gotten away.

He took another slow step back, trying not to stumble as Fundy shifted in his arms. His arms aches, constantly announcing their presence as he slowly inched the other to the ground, following suit a few moments later.

He forced himself to pick the other up, stumbling where he had last seen Purpled. Before the other had fallen and Ranboo had screamed and now he couldn't hear their answer.

They weren't dead. He knew that somehow.

But Purpled had to be injured and he had to help! Could he call an ambulance? The only first aid he knew was putting band aids on things and that didn't fix broken bones.

But how to call an ambulance? He didn't have his phone. In fact, he had nothing on him right now. Ranboo chewed his bottom lip, considering his dilemma. Find someone, he decided. It didn't matter if he had to steal their phone. Though he'd rather not have to? Surely, there had to be someone out still. They had gotten closer to the tourist areas and those still had a few people at night, browsing the wares.

So. Ask. Then theft.

Maybe Tommy, Tubbo, and Purpled were rubbing off on him.

But he couldn't help the rush of relief as part way there, he stumbled out into a side street and someone was there. They were reading a map brochure in their hands, beautifully manicured nails tapping against the sleeve of their red dress.

"Hey!" Ranboo called, sunglasses jerking up to meet his as he rushed closer. "Can I have your phone? I'm in a rush. Phone. Needed. Please. Or thank you?"

"Why do you need that?" They said, tucking the map brochure away. Ranboo tried to take a deep breath, jittering on his feet. Every extra moment was one where Techno would catch Purpled, Purpled who was injured and Ranboo was just standing here.

"My friend were taking me and my other friend home." He said, adjusting Fundy and very aware of how suspicious this looked. He really wanted his headphones and a nice soundtrack

right now. “But I heard him scream and I think he’s hurt.”

He left out the part about parkour, fairly certain that was illegal. And for a moment, it looked like the other hadn’t believed him but instead, they nodded. He must be a better liar than he thought.

“Show me the way, I have medical training.” They said. Ranboo hesitated. That was tempting but if Techno found them-

“I really just need a phone-“ He hesitated.

“Eret.” They said. Ranboo nodded. That was a weird name but who was he to judge?

“He shouldn’t be badly hurt, I’d rather call for help.” He said. An ambulance was no safer but surely, the mer wouldn’t interrupt them going to the hospital? Maybe?

“Really, I insist. You look like you could use some help anyways.” Eret said and Ranboo eyed him. How hard was it to steal a phone anyways? He needed it but maybe he should cut his losses and run for Purpled. He shifted his weight, not sure whether to bolt away or towards to steal the phone-

Heavy, terribly familiar golden hands landed on his shoulders.

“You found them, Eret!”

Chapter End Notes

Philza: No one else gets involved

Every other pod: Immediately gets involved

The pups: Splitting is up is how you get killed in a horror movie

The pups: So anyways-

In their defense, they’re exhausted, incredibly stressed out, and not exactly experienced.

Punz has been waiting to yoink Purpled and of course, his brother had to go and get himself hurt! Eret actually was just reading a map, she had no clue but he’s not going to look a gift horse in the mouth. And Techno wants to maul these cringe losers. Bruh. He just wants to bring the pups back and read his book and they think they can take them? One injured and one lost? Bad combo with protector instincts.

Also! The weekly post will be moving to Friday! It works much better with my schedule.

In Hot Water

Chapter Notes

It's Tommy and Tubbo time!

Clay and his friends may be dead now but their role in the story is not quite done.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

It was the scream that first got his attention Tommy couldn't help but slide to stop, only Tubbo's hand keeping him upright. He turned back, facing down the alley "Did one of those fucking bastards..."

He couldn't wrap his fucking head around it. Purpled head a punch like a fucking tank and Ranboo- well, he couldn't run for shit and had a backbone like an éclair but he did have that freezing shit. They rounded each other out. And they might have Fundy but they also knew this town and they couldn't have gotten caught. Those fucking bastards.

"I don't know." Tubbo said, glancing down the alleyway like it personally offended him. His hand flinched, reaching for his pocket before jerking away. Tubbo always had explosives or prank tools on hand. It was weird seeing him without, something that danced a fucking little jig on Tommy's nerves because He Did Not Like It.

"I'll get you more."

"Let's get running again." Tubbo said, his shoulders slightly slumped. "Let's just go. I think it's Philza and Wilbur who are following us. And if Purpled and Ranboo did get caught, we're going to need as much of a lead as we can to double back."

"But-"

"Tommy, we're not leaving them." Tubbo said firmly, staring into his eyes. "But the route straight back is where Wilbur and them are following and we're not technically safe tonight until we get to Sally's. It's either we get a lead and swing wide to the area or we make it to the safe zone and back track and I have no clue how much farther it will be. But if we're wrong or they have it handled, we'll mess it up and I can't."

It made terrible sense but he still didn't like it at all.

"It hadn't sounded like either of them." but neither did it sound human, Tommy didn't say. It didn't sound like the scream of a human, but something higher, more crackly. The kind of voice made for under the crashing waves and not the air above.

Something that was making him feel very very panicky, taking a half step towards a shadowy alcove beside the sidewalk before he pulled himself back.

His foot nearly caught a deep pothole, making him definitely not flail. He was simply waving his arms to assert his dominance over the pothole and warn it not to mess with him again.

“You good?” Tubbo asked, poorly stifling a giggle.

Tommy scowled, glaring at the pothole.

“It was the ground’s fault!” He protested, nearly trying to fold his arms before remembering that he was holding Tubbo’s hands. “It was trying to sabotage me. Block out all memory of that happening.”

Anyways. Moving beyond the event that definitely never happened, and ignoring Tubbo’s breathy giggles, he was going to turn his big wrinkly brain to better use!

He was just going to focus on the fact that it hadn’t sounded like either of them and nothing more. Purpled was a scary bitch and Ranboo has freezing powers. They’d make other people scream. He was their magnanimous friend, as none of his friends were as cool as him, but he loved them anyways, but they were kind of cool. Sometimes.

“Of course that fucking hipster would.” Tommy spat. Fuck, he should have known Wilbur was a bitch the moment he saw him. He just had that face. The face of a massive hipster bitch.

He lurched into a sprint, trying to focus on the feel of Tubbo’s hand on his and the slow thump of his shoes against the ground as they carried him forward. Nothing could catch the Big Man himself. He was a fucking speedster. The flash. Lightning coming down from the sky didn’t even have a hope of touching him. One of those American Racing shows tried to recruit him but he was like ‘no, no, I’m busy with my many wives’ and they just had to respect that. Big Man was fast.

He definitely did not feel tired or sore and he definitely didn’t stumble more than once while running through the alleys, hoping they had picked the right way back to Sally’s house.

He was pretty sure that they had. 95%. Tubbo said something about the star patterns and Purpled pointing this way before shrugging and he had looked at the moons. Also, Big Men never got lost! They simply went on an alternate ad-ven-ture!

They were slowing down. Tommy gritted his teeth, beginning to tug back. “Maybe we should go look for them.” He said. “Totally not because that scream was them but because they’re probably kicking someone’s ass and it would be really funny to watch.”

“But we could run right into them!” Tubbo protested. And ah shit. Tommy recognized that tone. He hadn’t heard it in a long time, not after they got a better social worker who actually occasionally listened to them sometimes instead of thinking they were hot shit who knew everything and they were just dumb kids.

That was Tubbo's pre-breakdown tone. His panic tone where his thoughts got going too fast and started struggling with the fact that things were unpredictable. Tubbo had tried to explain how it felt before and immediately it kind of went over Tommy's head but it was enough that Tommy knew he was in a bad spot when he was using his tone.

"I know, Tubs, but they could be in front of us too. Or to the side. Or like above, I dunno, Philza has birds? Maybe he is a fucking bird?" Tommy, started tugging him sideways, towards a route heading vaguely to where the scream was. Maybe. He was definitely not kind of lost in this stupid fucking town where all the houses looked the same for some fucking reason.

"But if they get caught." Oh, shit, oh fuck, Tubbo's eyes were shiny. He needed firecrackers and hugs and he only had one of those. "Then-"

"We break them the fuck out. Wilbur's a hipster, I could destroy him. And I bet Techno's scary but he's hiding such a big complex like meh meh meh, I'm so scary." Tommy said. Tubbo started following him, making his shoulders slump a little in relief. "Philza? He's old as fuck. I'd bet his bones would just crumble instantly if you hit him."

"Ew." But this time it was a bit lighter, the smile not quite so forced. More like, 'this is a shitty fucking place' and less like 'i'm about to burst into tears and go feral'.

Not much. But it had to be true. If the other two got caught, then they'd just fucking break them out. That's what they'd do. There was no more to it then that because they totally had this in a fucking bag.

Which, is of course when the fucking singing started.

He had a single moment of hazy thought, and 'oh, I fucking know this song' and then this wave of quietness hit him. Not contentedness. Quietness. Tommy spent about five seconds trying to think of a better word before giving up, stumbling slightly as his feet began to tug him forward.

It was beautiful. Ethereally so, like a fucking angel choir drifting through the breeze or hot women or something. Like the Able Sisters but better which is something that he'd never thought he'd say but it somehow fits. It's good. It's better than good.

It lingers, drifts around him, overwriting his every thought until all he can think about is the music.

'Come here' It seems to whisper into his ears. *'Are't you tired of running?'*

And suddenly-

He was. He was really tired. So tired that every step forward felt like a struggle, even as the music tugged him forward. He needed to follow it but he also just wanted to curl up and nap. He wanted to-

(And if something in the back of his mind screamed and struggled, swearing at him not to follow the music? He couldn't hear it. The music wrote over its screams, drowning out all of its struggles until all he could think about was seeing where the music was coming from.)

'Just a little bit closer. Come here, sunshine and little bee. Just a little bit closer and you'll never have to run again.'

Never running again sounded nice. He was really tired of running. He and Tubbo hadn't had chill time in so long, not since the beach, but the thought drifted away as quickly as it came.

He was getting closer, slowed as he was by his exhaustion. The music turned mischievous, quicker. Happier and he found himself tilting his head, trying to hear more of it. Somehow, he knew that he had made the music happy and he felt like he should be happy too. He had been good- was, was being good? He didn't know. Thinking was hard.

It was in the space between one moment in the next.

One moment, he was sinking deeper into the song, the dream. Being led forward by the gorgeous music.

And the next he was falling. All of the breath wooshed out of his lungs with a panicked groan.

"Fucking hell." Tommy swore, wincing at the stinging pain from his knees. That was going to leave a fucking bruise. He was going to write a strongly worded letter to whoever fucking left this pothole here and then he was going to burn their house down. With the pothole!

That was-

Wait.

Hadn't they already passed the pothole. A while back? Tommy glanced up, hand instinctively tightening on Tubbo's hand as the other tried to tug him forward. "Bitch, you're not even going to ask me if I'm okay?" He said, looking up. Usually Tubbo would be laughing at him by now.

Glazed eyes met him, half lidded like Tubbo was about to fall asleep. Even half hunched over, Tubbo was still facing away, not even glancing at Tommy who had just fallen like a fucking zombie. Despite the exhaustion wearing him down, Tubbo kept trying to tug him forward as if following some kind of invisible string.

Or a song.

"Are you okay, Sunshine?"

That fucking hipster son of a bitch.

His hand stung as he pushed himself up. He could hear it on the air now, if he tried to listen. Still ethereal, still beautiful, and gods wasn't that fucking unfair. It wasn't as good as his masterful singing but damn. Even as the notes drifted around him, trying to tug him under, Tommy clenched his fist, and it drifted away.

He glared at Wilbur. “You really fucking suck at hide and go seek, don’t you?”

The other laughed, leaning against the wall of the alley way. “Why would you say that?” He said, smiling widely. “I’d say I’m rather good. Why run when you can bring them straight to you? You got rather too far for my tastes anyways.”

“I don’t know if you noticed but you aren’t that fucking good.” Tommy tried to take a step away but Tubbo wouldn’t let him, still tugging forward. Judging by Wilbur’s words, they had to be close to Sally’s, fucking score. “How fucking long does that last? What did you do to him?”

It reminded him of when Tubbo was moonstruck, just way less talkative. But it put him on edge to see those empty eyes, not even a glance for him. Like Tubbo didn’t even know he was there and Tommy scowled even harder, glaring at Wilbur.

“Long enough.” Wilbur hummed. “They used to call me the siren of Mako, you know? Why run after your food if you can just bring it to you, am I right? I was ahead of the times, inventing delivery food before it was even thought up by a human.”

“Bitch, I’m ahead of you.” Tommy. “Your singing isn’t that fucking good. I defeated it by tripping. You really need to get good because wow, that’s a sad fucking loss for you. Stupid hipster musician gets defeated by a pothole.”

“Aw Sunshine, you liked my singing before.” A sickly grin spread over Wilbur’s face as he leaned forward. “You wanted me to sing for you before at the music shop.”

“You tried to eat Tubbo!”

“I said I was sorry! Say it’s okay!”

“Fuck you!” Tommy said, waving a hand broadly. “You assholes keep saying things like oh, if we had known, we would have treated you better and expected us to just listen to you!. But you only give two fucks about us because we’re part of your fucking species! You think me like you during fucking the music shop visit was hot shit when I now know you would have fucking eaten me without a second thought if I was a human! You can’t keep fucking gloating about that and saying it’s fucked up I don’t like you when you wouldn’t have looked twice otherwise!

You didn’t give a shit about Tubbo until you realized you fucked up! If Tubbo hadn’t been in the pool that night-” He choked on the words, on the truth that he knew but hadn’t wanted to think about. Because while he slept peacefully in bed, Tubbo was walking away from him. Had nearly disappeared forever. “You lie and lie and lie and call us fucked up when we call you out on it and tell you that you’re just a lying arse. You wouldn’t have looked twice at us if it wasn’t than this so why can’t we go back to that?”

And for a moment.

He wins.

The cocky smirk falls from Wilbur's face, replaced with something closer to devastation. His mouth fell open slightly but there were no silvery words or sweet music and Tommy felt an ugly sense of pride in his chest at the thought.

"If it hadn't been for you fucks, I'd be at home right now." He threw it in his face. "I'd be talking to Clem about how their day at work or mainlining coke while talking to one of my many very hot girlfriends, And Tubbo wouldn't be freaking about planning and Purpeld would get to go back to fishing and Ranboo wouldn't have to pretend that he's not fucking traumatized by the fact he keeps getting pushed in the ocean."

There was a future there and the bitterness lodges in his throat. A couple weeks ago, he had been hoping that Clem would be an okay foster parent and then that Clay would shut the fuck up and then that Purpeld and Ranboo would think they were cool. A future he hadn't wanted at the time but now he kind of did.

"But now, it could never happen because of you fuckers. Because Clem is gone." He snorts in bitter amusement and he clings harder to Tubbo, trying to trace what exactly had knocked him out of the music. The fall? The blood? Fish brain being useful for once?

"Toms-"

"Shut the fuck up."

But Wilbur keeps going like he had never spoken, that devastated look on his face. "Look, I know that we did not handle things well. And that you're still struggling with it but I hadn't realized that you doubted us. We really do like you."

"That's what you fucking got out of that?" Tommy said, incredulously as he stared at Wilbur.

"Maybe we got off on the wrong foot but it's different now!" Wilbur insisted. "Maybe we wouldn't have met but we probably would have! And Dad, me, and even Techno like you guys! You're so sweet and soft and clingy even when you're being stubborn! The human thing would have been a problem but a fixable one."

"By throwing us in the pool." Tommy said and he couldn't even work up the energy to swear. Wilbur didn't say no. Not blood, not with how he could feel the blood on his palms, annoyingly slick. Not the fish brain which was begging him to just curl up and hide.

"Sunshine, we do love you guys. And maybe we messed up a bit but we can fix that."

"Can't you love us as humans?" Tommy said, plaintively. The fish brain was excruciatingly quiet as he looked at Wilbur, looking for any sign of the funny guy who went with him to the music shop that day.

Why couldn't Wilbur love him with his humanness instead of despite his humanness?

"Why do you want to be human so much?" Wilbur said, and he had the gall to sound confused. He didn't know what he had expected and somehow, Wilbur had still disappointed him. Not the fall either, he didn't really remember the fall, just hitting the ground and pain-

“If you have to fucking ask, you can fuck right off.” Tubbo was going to kill him for this because Tommy pulled his hand to his face and bit down. Hard.

Tubbo jerked with an odd chirping sound, shaking his head and Tommy couldn’t help the swooping relief as the emptiness drained out of his eyes. “Tommy, what the fuck?” And then his eyes fell on Wilbur. “...Tommy, what the fuck.”

“Let’s fucking go!” Tommy cheered. Biting fixed everything! He should have known that biting people would never steer him wrong and he could totally trust it at every point. Wilbur took a step forward and oh, fuck right. “Let’s fucking go.”

“You’re not going anywhere.” Wilbur said. But the menacingness was slightly undercut by the hipster glasses. “Do you really think you won with that?”

“You can’t catch us anymore. We know how to break out.” And unlike Techno, Wilbur wasn’t quite as fast. He had seen it before and even Wilbur said he didn’t like running. Easy wins.

Wilbur laughed, a cold smug sound. If he had been devastated before, it was gone now, dropped like a mask to the floor. “You think that works forever?” He said. “Little itty bitty pups have no resistance to magic at all. And they don’t call me the siren for nothing. All I have to do is sing a little bit louder.”

It would have been proper menacing if it wasn’t for that pathetic little scream he made when he got pepper sprayed a second later.

“What the fuck.” He howled, bending over to scrub at his eyes. Tommy’s head jerked up, meeting wild and familiar eyes. Andy stared back, bruises clear in the darkness, his eyes wide and afraid.

“What-”

“No time! Run!” Tubbo yanked him forward, sprinting past Wilbur and grabbing Andy, dragging him along as well. Something tugged them back but Tommy tugged forward, sick of being around Wilbur. The vibes were rotten and he was done here.

They didn’t stop running until they stumbled into a street still filled with tourists browsing, lit by streetlamps. Tubbo stumbled to a stop, spinning to glare at Andy.

“What the fuck were you thinking?” He whisper yelled. “He would have killed you if he hadn’t been distracted with us! That was such a stupid plan that it’s a miracle you aren’t dead right now! Seriously abysmal planning, 2/10, what were you thinking?”

“He’s one of those fuckers!” Andy whisper yelled back. “I don’t fucking regret it all! Why do you care, you’re one of them.”

He spits the words like it’s poison and Tommy feels Tubbo flinches as he lunges forward.

“Don’t put us in the same fucking basket as them. Why are you even here?” Tommy said, glaring at him. “Are you fucking stalking us like a wrongun?”

“What the fuck?” Disgust slid across Andy’s face. “No!”

“Then what were you doing out here?” Tubbo said, shaking his head. “With pepper spray?”

Andy scoffed. “Kind of hard to sleep when you see your friends get torn apart in front of you.” He said. “The screaming and nightmares make it really hard.. I just wanted to take a fucking walk but the tourists kept talking about it so I just kept fucking walking and then I heard yelling. Figured a fight would make me feel better.”

“Clay was an ass.” Tommy mumbled and Tubbo elbowed him. Fair. He hadn’t known Andy had seen it but he did remember the look in his eyes at school. It lingered here, the fear of someone who had watched death.

“He was an ass but he was my friend.” Andy said, and the anger couldn’t help when Tommy could see that he was shaking. “And when I saw that fucking asshole and realized he was one of them-”

Good for him. Fucking ace. And for a moment, Tommy found himself like Andy. For like, a moment. He was still a bully before, even though he went through hell. That was still a thing, in the back of his mind.

“You could have died.” Tubbo said. “He’s going to be pissed that you did that to him.”

“I’m dead anyways.” Andy laughs, an ugly bitter sound. “The one that murdered my friends only kept me alive for information and he’s gotten everything I have.”

Honestly, Tommy thought this bitch was dead. Dream had kind of implied murder but he guessed that maybe they hadn’t? It had been pretty ambiguous.

“But you don’t have to die tonight.” Tubbo said. “Go home.”

The laugh cut short, Andy staring at them. “You really are one of them, aren’t you.”

“Not willingly.” Tommy mumbled. “And we’re not with fucking Dream before you bitch about that. Just- fucking, go home. If they were your friends, they would probably think you’re a massive bitch for getting yourself murdered.”

Andy looked like he wanted to hit him but Tommy stood firm, glaring at him and he glanced away.

At least someone should get to go home tonight out of this and live safely.

...Maybe, just maybe, they’d talk to Dream and get him to stop. They probably could.

“Yeah, Clay would fucking say that.” Andy mumbled, staring at the crowd. “You’re fucking weirdos.”

“Fucking die then, I guess.” Tommy scoffed.

“I’m not doing this because of you guys.” Andy said, but then he shoved something into Tubbo’s hands, turning and disappearing into a group of tourists.

“Here’s to hoping he stays away.” Tubbo mumbles, opening his hand. Another can of pepper spray and Tubbo’s vicious grin matches his own. “Fuck the plan. Let’s go find the others.”

Chapter End Notes

Tommy and Wilbur were not supposed to talk for that long but Tommy took over the scene!

And yeah, I was wondering if anyone would notice I never confirmed Andy’s death! He’s going through it right now but he did get to pepper spray Wilbur! Zero hesitation, as soon as he realized that the guy threatening his classmates was a mer. Toss up on whether he’ll actually listen to Tommy and Tubbo though! It was fun planning that scene.

Wrong Side of the Tracks

Chapter Notes

New Life series came out! I'm so excited to watch it!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Eret catches the hand that comes up, pushing it back like Ranboo's a kitten batting at a tiger.

He might as well be, Ranboo thought, tinged with bright panic as he's tugged back. He stumbles, trying to catch Fundy and keep him close. Eret half chuckles, shaking her head.

"Be nice to him." He admonishes. He reaches for Fundy but Ranboo shies away as much as he can, hoping neither of them could feel how he was shaking. This really wasn't good, he thought.

"I'm not that bad." The other said. Up close, he's much bigger than he seemed fighting Techno at the restaurant. However, almost anyone could look small next to Techno. "You're not scared are you?"

"Nah, man." Ranboo said which was a pro move and definitely not a lie. Because he was very scared but also, it seemed impolite to lie?

He had no clue where Tubbo and Tommy were and Purpled was injured nearby. Fundy was standing sort of on his own feet by now but it was clear that he was still out of it. And he was facing down two mer. Not great! In fact, this was exceptionally bad and Ranboo did not want to be here!

Right. Okay. What would Purpled do?

...he didn't have any knives. Or confidence in his ability to stab people. What would Tommy do? Honestly, Ranboo had no clue. Tommy was like a wild card packed into a feral tornado.

Tubbo talked! That seemed doable!

Other than the whole having to talk to them thing. That seemed quite a bit harder. The hands on his shoulders tugged and Ranboo dug in his heels. "Woah, woah, no." He said. "No secondary locations! I like my kidneys!"

"You're-" Eret stared at him for a moment and Ranboo stared back at him, his fear being temporarily overwritten by mortification. Just bury him. Put him into the ground. Why did he get ice powers when he could have gotten the power to instantly dig a hole and bury himself in it? "I thought you said your friend was hurt and needed help?"

“I’m not bringing you over to him!” Ranboo protested instantly. For one, he was pretty sure that counted as a betrayal. And for two, he didn’t trust either of these guys as far as he could throw them.

Fuck this, actually having to talk to people outside of his friends was far too difficult.

Couldn’t he just...

The air around them dropped a few degrees, Ranboo wobbling with the effort as he tried to focus on that feeling of cold and fear and *freezing*. The way the water laid heavy in the air, puddles still hidden between cobblestones and in potholes. It’s tiring, more tiring than chilling the paint but it was worth it and Ranboo tried to will it to freeze.

Only to be frozen under pure white eyes. “None of that.” Eret said crisply, his shades raised. Even with his cheap sunglasses on, Ranboo could feel his eyes boring directly into his own.

Eret didn’t have any pupils. His mind broke trying to wrap around the concept, trying to see where the Iris and pupil were, only to be stymied by pure white. Not even the hint of veins or the murkiness of going blind.

It’s like none of that ever existed in the first place. Like someone had just plucked two large pearls from the seabed and placed them in Eret’s eyes.

And despite his effort, he can feel the ice slip away from the fingertips. “Much better.” Eret said, replacing his sunglasses and ignoring the look on Ranboo’s face. “I know this is stressful right now but we’re going to take a little field trip over to where your friend is. Don’t you want to know if they’re okay?”

“No.” Ranboo chokes out, shaking his head quickly.

“They might need medical attention and both me and Foolish knows basic medical aid. Especially Foolish, you wouldn’t believe how much he injured himself during construction.” Eret said. They were never going to let him call an ambulance. “If you’re friend fell, they could have a concussion and need help.”

“Hey! I don’t get injured that often!” Foolish snaps and Eret laughs.

“Niki is going to get sick of patching you up someday.” He said and it’s so fond that it actually makes Ranboo a little sick.

He frantically shakes his head more. “No, no.” He protests, almost feeling dizzy

And then Foolish makes this warbling sound and Ranboo-

It’s like everything drops for a brief moment. Like he’s standing at the top of a rollercoaster and suddenly, he plunges to the bottom. It stretches on for forever and for only a second and he comes back to himself, hanging in their grip, Fundy still wrapped in his arms.

“Foolish, you need to be more careful.” And for a moment, Ranboo thinks he’s looking at him but no, Eret is looking behind him. “What if he had fallen?”

“I’m keeping a tight grip on him!” Foolish? Ranboo would judge but he was pretty sure there was a saying about that or something. “He wouldn’t have fallen! Why can’t we bring him back home first? My magic doesn’t work well with this constant moving.”

Eret pursed his lips. “Well-“

Oh no. Definitely not. For one, he was pretty sure this was how he would lose his kidneys and then he was pretty sure Purpled would kill him because he’s pretty sure the other owned his sellable organs at this point. For two, *Purpled was injured*.

Injured or trapped because as snarly as the other was, he never would have just abandoned Ranboo like this. If he hadn’t turned up by now, then something had seriously gone wrong.

If he was hurt, Ranboo would effectively be abandoning him to, okay, he didn’t know exactly what would happen. But he’d be a sitting duck for anyone coming by!

“No, please.” He protested. “I’ll take you to him, okay? I don’t want us to get separated.”

It takes a little cough but Ranboo prods the fish brain until it produces a little chirp. It sounds a little more strangled than the weird echoing chirp of before but it works!

Eret visibly waves before shaking her head. “I was just going to call over Jack but we can go over instead then if that would help you.”

“Erreeeeet.” Foolish huffs. “I want ready traps first.”

“Trying to separate them will just cause more trouble and if the pup is hurt, it’s blood in the water.” For a beautiful moment, Ranboo thinks they’re going to let go of him. But instead, Foolish pushes him along, effortlessly supporting his and Fundy’s weight.

What the fuck were the mer on? Why were they all so strong?

Reluctantly, Ranboo pulled them forward, leaning them to where he last saw Purpled. Foolish leaned forward.

“So, how old are you anyways? Because I bet on ten and if you are, Jack will owe me twenty bucks.” He said, voice light and curious. Ranboo kept his mouth shut, staring straight ahead. “Aw, come on, we don’t have to be like this! We can chat and be friends! Talk to me.”

“Foolish, you’re stressing him out.” Eret scolded. She reached for Fundy and Ranboo shied away again, pulling them closer. “It’ll be easier if you let me carry them. It can’t be good for you to carry this much weight.”

“I’m good.” Ranboo said. It was partially true. His shoulder really aches and his back was probably never going to recover from this. But it was better than letting them carry Fundy.

The other shifted on his shoulder, murmuring something too quiet to hear. Promising! But also bad because Ranboo needed him fully awake now and not still half asleep! Whatever Wilbur had done, I’d had been potent.

“Oh, so you’ll talk to him and not to me?” Foolish said. “This is bias, partiality, rude and hurtful and-“

The childish whine dropped away to dead silence. In fact, it all dropped away, a facade of cheeriness that Ranboo hadn’t even known he was looking at until it was gone. Foolish stared ahead, friendly green eyes like that of a predator.

On any other day, Ranboo would panic at seeing Punz.

But he couldn’t even bring himself to feel that much.

Because curled in Punz’s arms was a very familiar violet shape. Ranboo could identify him in his sleep- no, dumb brain, he wouldn’t be able to see him if he was asleep. Purpled, face screwed up in a grimace, glaring at Punz like he could kill the other if he tried hard enough.

“Punz.” Eret said, the name falling like a guillotine. “Funny seeing you here”

Blue eyes flickered to Ranboo before looking away just as quickly. “I could say the same.” Punz said. Ranboo couldn’t help but keep looking at Purpled. There were some nasty bruises that weren’t there before but he looked blessedly alive. Angry, but alive.

“Oh, god fucking damn it.” Purpled mumbled, eyes flickering to Ranboo. He shrugged awkwardly, not quite sure what to say. What kind of protocol was there for meeting while being kidnapped? Was he supposed to wave?

“I think you should put him down now.” Eret said, crisp and chilly. “We’ve been helping his hatchmates find him and we can take over from here.”

“No need, I can take over.” Punz said and Ranboo cringed a little.

“A mercenary, helping pups?” Eret said, her voice dripping acid. Foolish hissed, a low rattling sound that made the fish part of him quail.

No, not just that. Ranboo couldn’t help the full body shudder, the way he hunched into himself. It didn’t ease even after the hiss vanished and Foolish was gently patting his shoulder.

It should feel so nice, he thought.

He had secretly dreamed of something like this when he was younger. When his parents were out at the millionth party, without him or shuffling him along like an ill fitting prop.

Tucked away with a book, he’d think about how nice it would be to have a family who really cared. The kind of family that would drop everything if he got hurt or sick instead of hiring a temporary nanny. Or who spent time with him every day. The kind of family kids had in books but even bigger.

And now he had it and he couldn’t say why exactly it felt sick and wrong but it did. Because part of him still desperately wanted to be the kind of person, felt sickly glad at being so loved

and cherished that these three would fight. A little thread of yearning to let them pick up the heavy weight and get to go back to being a child.

The other really just wanted a book to hide behind and to be far away from here.

Purpled made a frantic motion at him. Ranboo shrugged back. A jabbing motion. Foolish raised their voice but Ranboo glossed over it, trying to figure out what Purpled was saying.

Another jabbing motion. Ranboo tilted his head slightly. Was Purpled stirring? Stir the pot maybe? Or, no, it could be pulling in fishing nets? Were they going to go fishing? What was with the charades?

Purpled rolled his eyes and stabbed Punz.

Ranboo had half a moment of wondering where he got it before realizing that, of course, this was Purpled. He must have kept the knives from Sally's house.

Punz didn't have the same knowledge. He staggered as bright red spread over his white hoodie, looking more confused than pained. It was enough for Purpled to roll out of his arms, hitting the ground with a wince before lunging at Eret.

Okay, Ranboo was bad at charades but he was pretty sure that the next steps were obvious.

Fundy yelped as Ranboo threw them to the side, wriggling barely free of Foolish's arms with their combined body weight. "Woah, woah, hey, I think we need to calm down here." Foolish said, coaxingly as he reached forward.

"What the fuck is going on?" Fundy said in his ear, raising his head slightly. Ranboo dragged him backwards, watching Purpled scramble past with the bloodstained knife. He was limping slightly, but the sight still made something in Ranboo ease.

"Oh, wow! He's miraculously recovered. I think we can just go now." Ranboo hedged, starting to inch back. Fundy stumbled back and Ranboo checked, relieved to see the fogginess in his eyes was mostly clear now, an alertness present that wasn't there before.

Purpled gave him a look when he reached him. "What the fuck did you get yourself into while I was gone?" He asked.

"You fell off a roof, man, I don't think you get to judge?" Ranboo said. Purpled rocked a hand back and forth.

"No need." Eret said, glaring at Punz who had taken a step forward. "Are you really trying to run away again? And you think we'll let you?"

"You?" Punz said. "I'm not letting you take my little brother away from me. Him and his hatchmates are coming with me and that's final. Do you really want to get into a fight with Dream?"

"Dream's not here." Foolish said, shifting. It was a bad match up for Punz. Maybe. They called him a mercenary which could mean he was the better fighter. But it didn't matter in the

end because he didn't want to go with either of them.

(Except, he did. Just a little bit. But that wasn't something he wanted to acknowledge outside of the library with his headphones blasting Zombies Chasing You Remix.)

"Yes?" Ranboo asked hopefully, shuffling back after Purpled. The air dropped a few degrees. Could he freeze them before-

"Bruh. Why is it so crowded here."

If Punz's arrival had been like a stone getting thrown into a pool, Techno's was like a boulder. Which was then slam dunked into the pool and followed with some gravel for good measure.

He prowled down the alley, reminding Ranboo of a shark circling into the shallows as the other lazily assessed the situation. Those ruby red eyes landed on him and he froze, kept pinned until the eyes moved off of him.

"When I say go, we run." Purpled whispered into his ear. A cold breeze whipped around their shoulder. Ranboo didn't have the confidence to tell him that that might not even work.

But what else did they have to try?

"Techno." Eret said with a voice that could have cut diamond. "We don't need your interference here."

"Really? Even a pup could see how those two look ready to jump out of their skins. Not even twenty minutes and you've traumatized them. Cringe." Techno said with a snort.

Ranboo heard a sharp gasp next to his ear. "Fundy?" He whispered, glancing at the other.

"What the fuck did I miss? Where the fuck am I?" Fundy whispered back. Ranboo glanced back at the mers, Eret talking about some sort of treaty while Techno rolled his eyes and Punz tried to pretend like he wasn't slipping close and closer even as Foolish blocked his path.

"Well the good news is, you probably still have your kidneys." Ranboo joked. Fundy stared at him in mute horror. He winced and shrugged.

"Good, you're back. Start walking backwards." Purpled whispered, starting to tug him back. They didn't get three feet before Techno made some kind of sharp hissing sound, freezing Ranboo's feet to the ground.

"Don't move." He said, not looking away from Eret. After a moment he glanced away, at them again. "Didn't know that had started up already."

"What?" Ranboo said. But he was pretty sure he already knew the answer. Because Fundy hadn't frozen, had stumbled when he and Purpled did. And when the common denominator was the Mer thing?

They really were just taking losses over and over again.

The wind rose but Eret just flipped up his glasses again, and it died as soon as it rose. “They wouldn't be trying to leave and stressed if you had let us take them to the tide pools.”

“Great idea. I'll do that then.” Techno drawled. Eret clicked sharply. When he looked away, Ranboo could feel the feeling in his legs returning but then it was Foolish hissing, with a darkly inquisitive look.

“I'm going to stab them.” Purpled said, staring at the knife. “I'm going to kill them all.”

“I called dibs years ago.” Fundy mumbled, looking put out in a way that meant he was telling the truth. Ranboo tried not to wonder what it meant about him that he immediately thought about where to hide the bodies.

“Right.” Ranboo huffed under his breath. So. They noticed when they ran. They could deal with that. But they needed to get away before everything escalated. At the moment, things were only held at bay because no one had a clear chance to take them all but if that changed, it would ruin everything. “How strong can you make the wind?”

“I could send a knife into his back.” Purpled said ominously. Punz had just casually waved at the other's glaring and Purpled made this little hissing sound that would probably get Ranboo stabbed for pointing it out.

“What about throwing that trash can into the air?” Ranboo said, pointing down the alley to one of the dumpster areas. He kept his voice hushed, but he was pretty sure Foolish had heard them, considering the slightly confused look on the other's face.

That was fine. Ranboo didn't care about the other hearing them. He just didn't want the other stopping them. Tubbo and Tommy needed to find them.

If these assholes wanted them all together, then he could deal with the consequences.

Purpled don't even ask twice, wincing before the trash can was yeeted, almost clearing the rooftop. Before coming down with a magnificent crash that made Ranboo nearly jump out of his skin and Punz swear as he dodged the trash can aimed at his head. Foolish barked out a laugh, shoulders shaking with mirth.

“Bruh. You couldn't have aimed better?” Techno said. “A few inches more and he would have been out.”

“Fuck you, he's injured. But I guess someone like you wouldn't have understood that.” Punz snarled. “You'd probably tear them apart. People call me a mercenary but you're worse.”

Techno rounded on him with an angry hiss, Eret taking a step back. “Maybe I should show you while your pod leader isn't called king.” He snapped. “And don't you dare touch them.”

Eret tilted his head. “I don't know what you're talking about.”

“Eret-“ Foolish said, glancing up.

If asked later, Ranboo would say he had no idea where the others got pepper spray, turned into a bomb, or even got up onto the roof. But he knew better than to look a gift horse in the mouth.

He ran.

(And tried not to think about how much he wanted to stay.)

Chapter End Notes

Ranboo's POV is so much fun to write! He's trying to hard but out of all of them, he's least equipped to fighting the toxic love the Mer offer because Purpled maxed stubbornness and Tommy and Tubbo had each other during the hard times. If he had been alone, he would have folded like a wet noodle but he's trying for his friends. It's so much fun exploring that perspective

Can you tell I like writing Foolish and Eret together? They're so funny.

And yes, the instinctual reactions are growing! That hiss is basically a pup warning, like sit down or get grounded is the closest approximation. Usually used when there's danger nearby or pups are acting bad.

Gonna go on hiatus for a week or two! I want some time to prep the plans for the next arc and work on some other fic projects

Riding for a Fall

Chapter Notes

Chapter update in honor of the one year anniversary! That feels weird.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They had managed to stagger through the alleys for five minutes before Fundy finally spoke. “What happened?” Fundy said, his eyes wide as he stared at the buildings around them like he had never seen them before.

“The good news is, you still probably have your kidneys.” Ranboo said, nervously jittering still. It felt like his stomach was a concrete mixer, churning over and over.

Did they really manage to get away? Or was it just a trick? He really didn’t know and it was driving his anxiety insane. In the moonlight, every shadow felt like a threat and Ranboo wanted to hide in his suit jacket or find his little spot in the library and never come out.

“Why are you saying that like it’s an actual risk?” Fundy said, frantically craning his head and glancing down at his stomach.

“That’s what my parents said would happen if I went with strange people.” Everyone stared at him. “Is that Not a normal thing?”

“You are such a deeply fucked up bitch.” Tommy said, looking strangely admiring for his words.

“Ranboo, when I said I’d steal your organs to pay off your debt, you know I was joking about that.” Purpled said. Ranboo stared at him. Oh, he was joking? That was relieving. “Right?”

“This feels like if I say something, it’ll be the wrong thing.” Ranboo said. Purpled’s eyes narrowed. “Right, how about we talk about something that’s not me, right? Right.”

“What the fuck.” Tommy whispered to himself.

“Well, that’s something messed up we don’t have time to dig into until our next scheduled mental breakdown.” Tubbo said because he is a cold and organized person and sometimes Ranboo thinks he would platonically marry him for that. He looks at Fundy, jogging awkwardly backwards.

“What?” Fundy said and Tommy scoffed. Another point for Tubbo and Tommy actually having telepathy. Maybe. Ranboo hasn’t hear any random cussing in his head.

“Do you remember anything?” Tubbo said. “Any detail at all of what happened before we found you, would be helpful.”

“I remember the grocery store and walking. I think I remember going into the house but then it got kind of blurry. I know that they were there but I can’t really remember what we had talked about. And then it was like I just woke up in the alleyway. You know, like when you’re really asleep and you keep falling back just before you wake up?” Fundy said. He squinted at the ground. “Some lyrics but I can’t remember the song they go to. I had the weirdest fucking dreams, man.”

“Sing it and maybe we’ll know.” Tommy said. “Sing for me, Fundy.”

“Fuck no.”

“Maybe it hits humans harder?” Tubbo pointed out, dragging them back on track. “Both me and Ranboo managed to gain back some control under the song.”

Ehhhhhhh, Ranboo wouldn’t say that. He mostly face planted in a very embarrassing way after screaming like a maniac in his head. Chalk that up as a win for major anxiety and the new fishy voice it had, but still. He would have preferred not to do that.

But then again, he hadn’t been catatonic like Fundy was.

“Maybe it’s because he was asking for something different.” Ranboo offered hesitantly. “Seemed like he wanted Fundy asleep and trapped but ours was more about getting eaten?”

“Maybe.” Tubbo said, his frown twisting. “We’ll have to chalk that up for later whether that’ll give us an advantage.”

Some sort of advantage that was. It certainly didn’t feel like an advantage, not when his legs burned and his chest hurt when he breathed.

“I don’t think that’ll help much soon.” Purpled said. “For every advantage it has, it seems like we have disadvantages. With that stupid sound, they said we were changing. Not that. More affected?”

Tommy made a sound of pure disgust and Ranboo tried not to think about how different it sounded from Tommy’s disgust when they first met in that classroom. “It’s like when a cat scruffs their kittens? I don’t fucking know, it feels weird and gross. Weird and gross and very wrong. Like a weird wrongun thing to do.”

That wasn’t it, not quite, but Ranboo knew what Tommy meant. It was a sort of feeling of paralysis, not true, but real.

When he was eight, he broke a vase. It was an accident, he had been running around. There was a video, online, of someone sliding across slick floors in their socks and he wanted to do the same and slide across the floor and laughed but the floor was too slick. He slipped. And slammed shoulder first into the podium.

It reminded him of that moment. Staring down at the shattered pieces and knowing with a child's confidence that this wasn't something that could be fixed with a glue stick scrounged from one of his dull art history tutoring sessions. The vase was broken.

Staring down and knowing that they were mad. And there was nothing to do but freeze. He was in trouble.

At that moment, there wasn't the fish voice in his head. Just him. And the bone deep knowledge that they were mad and the best thing to do would be to stay still and make them less mad.

"So, we're still growing. And changing." Tubbo said. "That explains why the diet shifted more over time and the increased sleeping."

Ranboo had slept so much this week, even with the sleep deprivation. It was weird. He was actually feeling groggy instead of aggravatingly awake and bizarrely aware of being alive in the mornings. He hated this.

"But now it's escalating." Ranboo said. "I don't, I don't think it's all of it yet."

It felt like getting dunked under water, his head held under a little longer each time. And if they were responding to that sound? That meant more.

"This is just so deeply fucked up." Fundy said. "I'm not joking, I thought my life was fucked but you guys? What the fuck did you do in a past life? Burn down an orphanage? Steal the Pope's hat."

"Oh, we should fucking do that." Tommy said, delighted, his hands shaping out something that looked far too similar to a conical hat.

"Let's not." Ranboo interrupted. "But if we're growing and changing, that means it can be reversed."

"It will be." Purpled said darkly. Unbidden, Ranboo remembered the school rumor that Purpled murdered people. "But that doesn't mean it isn't an inconvenience. We're most of the way back and they'll be distracted. Until the next full moon."

"But that's when things get fixed, right?" Ranboo said, checking the rooftops again.

Eret and Foolish were distracted, Techno and Wilbur with them and likely Punz with that fight. But he still felt like he was forgetting something, some sort of memory flickering on the edge of his tongue. He wished he had written it down but he hadn't and that meant he was stuck endlessly trying to circle around to it.

"Last chance to back out." And it should be creepy how everyone's heads snapped around to Tommy and his scrunched in on himself slightly, shoulders raised. "Look, I just thought I'd fucking say it. Last chance if someone wants to go with the creepy fish people."

"Isn't that the full moon." Tubbo said and Ranboo almost winced at how oddly flat it sounded. "The last chance."

“Well, yeah, it fucking is but if we get all the way to the island and you change your mind there, I’m shoving you into the corpse water again.” Tommy said, blowing out a sharp breath. “I just thought I’d come out and fucking say it, okay? No one’s around. If anyone changes their mind, we could go fucking shopping for who they want and drop them off.”

“Are you?” And Ranboo stays quiet, as Tubbo’s slow jog almost staggers to a stop. He forced himself to look around at the street they’re trudging down. The dying flowers in a windowsill vase, the car parked haphazardly with a student driver sticker on the bumper, the shadowy flicker of a bird swooping overhead. “Thinking of changing your mind.”

“Me? Fuck no.” The response doesn’t come instantly but it doesn’t sound forced. “They nearly killed you and we’re pretty sure they offer Clem and fuck knows what they did to Ranboo and Purpled’s family.”

“I think my family probably just sold me into adoption.” Ranboo said, staring very focusedly at a street light.

“Ranboo, if we get out of this, we’re egging your parents.” Tommy took a deep breath. “Look, I like some parts of them. It’s cool, the mer thing and swimming and it’s nice—“

The security. The security of being loved ferociously.

“But it’s not worth forgiving or forgetting.” Tommy said. “Unless you pick them, because then I guess I’m following.”

“I’m not.” Tubbo said, his mouth a sharp line. “I forgive nothing and hold grudges over everything. I think that they love us but they don’t actually have our best interests in mind.”

“They definitely fucking don’t. Punz would have pushed me in the pool himself, knowing it would most likely kill me.” Purpled said, a rare bit of honesty that feels like a bunch in Ranboo’s gut. “I can’t take any cash underwater, hard pass.”

“No.” The word springs, but he can’t say easily. Because it’s a little tempting, the weight in his bones as he looks around. Because he knows that they’d follow him and he’s almost sure they wouldn’t be mad. He could go with Bad who was almost nice and Dream was okay or Niki who looked like she gave great hugs or Techno who made him feel safe or Schlatt who was the first rich person to actually care.

Ranboo had gone most of his life coming to terms with the fact that his parents were not good parents. Not even good people. And he learned more and more things about his childhood that weren’t right every day.

But it was too much. It smothered. It scared him. “I’m good.” He follows up, weakly. Then, “You guys have preferences?”

He hadn’t exactly thought about who he’d most like to be kidnapped by.

“I don’t fucking know?” Tommy said and Tubbo shrugged wordlessly. Purpled rolled his eyes. “I mean, it’s clear none of us fucking do.”

“I’ve spent my entire life avoiding my dad and his family and I’m not stopping now.” Fundy said. “Fuck, I need a snack.”

“Oh, that sounds amazing. And a nap.” Ranboo said longingly. It was nice being able to say what he wanted and not worry about the words being twisted back at him, as a lure. “Can we watch kitten videos?”

“Sure.” Purpled said, shifting Fundy and patting Ranboo. Ranboo was pretty sure it was meant to be condescending but it honestly felt pretty nice. “We’ll watch some kitten videos before bed.”

The warmth didn’t stop how Ranboo felt like he was going to jump out of his skin at every sound. Even as Fundy found his footing again and shifted to walking on his own, Ranboo couldn’t shake the lingering unease.

Were they free? Did the distraction really work this time?

It didn’t feel real when Ranboo saw the warm glow as they turned the corner, the familiar yard and door. It didn’t feel real even as Fundy gasped something that sounded halfway between joy and a sob. They made it back and it felt less real the closer they got.

But they staggered up the steps with no one bursting out of the bushes. They climbed the steps and he stared at the weird divot on the porch and Tubbo rapped on the door, then knocked again.

But it was Sally who swung the door open, silver knife raised. And it was definitely her gasp as he lurched forward, the knife falling to the ground as she wrapped Fundy in a strangling hug. Ranboo looked awkwardly away, not sure what to say. We’re here for your reverse kidnapping? The kidnapper’s warranty had expired?

“I was so worried.” She said, voice choking through a sob. “I was so worried.”

“I know.” Fundy said, and he curls into Sally’s arm in a way that reminds Ranboo of when they were in elementary and Fundy was much smaller and hugs were much bigger.

He takes the moment to glance around at everyone. They weren’t looking so good. Purpled had his hands shoved in his hoodie and looked like he was only standing out of sheer spite. Tubbo and Tommy were leaning on each other, feet braced on the floor. Ranboo felt like he drank a redbull and then got run over by a tractor.

Sally broke away from their hug, glaring up and down the street. “Inside.” She said, eyes sharp.

“They can’t come after us until the next full moon.” Tubbo said, hands twisting slowly. “That was the deal. We made it back first.”

“The first thing you learn about dealing with them is how easily they can get out of it.” Sally said. “Inside. I don’t trust their word when they give it.”

Well, that was a dark notice. But possibly a good one considering they had another impending deal to consider. Ranboo shoved that thought into the corner of his mind. He was already a ball of anxiety, more wouldn't help.

"Where's Kristin?" He asked because that seemed like a safe topic.

"She went out to try and find you. I'll shoot her a text." Sally said. Fundy still hovered by her side like he worried he'd be ripped away. "Go to bed. I'll stand guard tonight. We'll end this at full moon."

Ranboo couldn't say he'd argue with that. Fundy sure was, insisting he should guard too. But he let Tommy wrap a hand around his, dragging him to the room that has sort of become theirs. He flopped into the pile, barely yelping when Purpled flops their head onto his stomach.

It was warm, cozy, and he could ignore the thread in his head that said that the bed wasn't right, that things could be better.

He couldn't ignore how it still felt like he was forgetting something that had (or should have?) happened tonight. But they were free, right? They made it back in time. They were safe and no one caught them.

And at the full moon, it would all be over.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for disappearing so long! I'm alright and thank you to everyone who checked in and left kind comments. It was very sweet and I promise I've been reading them. Just a lot of life stuff was happening and then writer's block hit like a train with burn out pulling a sucker punch.

But I'm feeling much better and it was fun doing a more introspective chapter and I've been working through outlines for outtakes, alternate endings for early scenes, and outside character POVs. But this chapter marked the last chance for any of them to go willingly, it feels like and things are starting to turn towards an end. I've got some really fun plans coming up. They haven't formed any preferences for their kidnapping, but what do you guys think? Just curious.

Missed the Boat

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for everyone's concern! I'm doing okay, got burned out for a bit and was working on other things. But I'm back now! I'm hoping to get H2O back on a weekly, or at least biweekly schedule.

I did hear about Wilbur Soot (a kudzu of a person). Right now, I haven't quite decided what to do for him in future writings, but for now, I'm just not going to be referring to his character at all. I haven't decided if I plan to stop completely? Or rename him as other authors are doing, because character Wilbur isn't the same as real person Wilbur, at least how I write him. I'm still thinking about it. All my love to Shelby and the others.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

“Guys, the next order of business is to destroy the sun.”

Tubbo made a sound of protest, reaching out to swat at Tommy. “Shuddap.” He said. The swat dislodged the blanket from his eyes and he squeaked, abandoning his plan and trying to claw his way back down into them. There was the sound of a scuffle and a strangely happy noise from Tommy.

He felt like he had gotten hit by a truck. Muscles he didn't know could ache were aching. Muscles he didn't even know existed were aching. Existence was agony, and Tubbo wanted no part in it.

“Guys. We gotta get up.” Couldn't he see Tubbo was trying to fuse into the blankets here? He didn't want to get up. He wanted to sleep until his muscles started feeling better. Getting up was for cowards. “Fuck it, I'll try Tubbo. He can't be any harder than the rest of you.”

Mneeeagh, they better not try him. Tubbo was cozy. Good and cozy. The kind of cozy that he had always yearned to achieve, warm and safe and sleeping in. Only a true villain would try and wake up someone so peacefully sleeping.

But whoever the voice was, they were a cruel and nasty person who should be nuked and wiped off the face of the earth. A hand grabbed Tubbo's shoulder, roughly shaking it.

“Nooooo.” He said, swatting at it. Why couldn't they leave him alone? He tugged at the hand, managing to claw it off of him and trying to snuggle back down into the blankets and someone sighed.

“I'm not looking forward to waking Tommy up if this is how you reacted.” They said with a groan. And then they committed the most grievous of sins, wounding Tubbo in the coldest of betrayals, in league with the worst of folks. With no humanity. No kindness. All cruelty. The

worst thing that had been done to him since he found out that he couldn't keep the bee hive he had found one day.

They ripped the blankets off his eyes, pulling it off of him almost completely.

Tubbo screeched as far too bright light and cold air hit him, hands shooting up to cover his eyes. How could they!

But the bright light woke him up to the point a little voice in the back of his mind said *oh hey maybe something is wrong and we should check that out.*

Distantly, he could hear odd chirping noises, like birds calling. Tubbo squinted through his fingers, wincing and closing them again. Opening them again. Closing again.

He was with Tommy. He was going to blow up the sun. What was it good for anyways?

"This is abysmal." He mumbled into his hands, slowly forcing them away again. The odd chirping noises had stopped and he decided not to think about why that was when his heart started sinking. Slowly, the orange blob standing over him resolved into a face. "Fundy, you are dead when I can move my arms again. I'm going to break every bone in your body."

"What?" Fundy squeaked, bringing his arms up like Tubbo wouldn't destroy him in a fight anyways. "Hey, in my defense, Mom sent me to wake you up!"

"Somebody better be dead." He mumbled. And then winced because he probably shouldn't say that anymore. Not when somebody could actually be dead.

He hoped Clem was alright. Maybe they just moved to the mainland or were out late at work. There was no body found so he could try and believe...

Tubbo couldn't delude himself down that train of thought when he thought of the look the mers had when they saw him, the hatred that dripped from their voices as they mentioned humans.

Clem wouldn't have sold them like Ranboo's parents, even if it would have been better for them. And Tubbo knew what happened to people who got too close to them. He had been a mer. Clem was not (Tubbo was almost 99.9999% certain at least after running the calculations. They wouldn't have missed that. Probably). And they probably wouldn't have just gone radio silent. They never had before. Clem had always sent them messages every morning checking in, and at night telling them to get to bed. Which meant that the mer probably took care of them.

He glanced at the others, but felt oddly sure before he even looked that the others were fine. And they were. Tommy was sleeping sprawled out over his legs, Purpled was an odd half exposed lump at the foot of the bed, and Ranboo hanging half off the side of the bed like some kind of freakish flexible skeleton.

Dimly through his sleep deprived brain, he remembered them staying up to watch kitten videos and cramming into the same bed to do it. They must have all fallen asleep at some

point.

“No, but you guys gave it a good go a few hours ago.” Tubbo stared up at him. “You guys clawed up Mom pretty good when she came in.”

Tubbo’s blood ran cold, breath freezing in his chest. “I don’t remember that.” He said, glancing down at his hands. They looked clean but... was it him or did his nails look sharper than before?

Normally, Tubbo kept his nails short because they would break off on accident or nick wires he was working with. But now, they were longer, coming to a tapered point.

Like his mer form. But not quite, he realized with a small shred of relief. His mer form had stubby claws, but his nails could pass for a human’s right now. But only barely and definitely not what he remembered them looking like. Did he check before he went to sleep? Wait, more pressing problem. He racked his mind, but truly couldn’t remember Sally coming in.

“Well, I do.” Fundy said, a trace of anger in his eyes as he folded his arms. “I’m the one who had to bandage her up.”

“Why are you here then?” Tubbo said with a yawn as he turned the possibilities over in his sluggish mind. Part of him wanted to go right back to sleep, all his hatchmates were here and the room wasn’t a good place but it was defensible with no big predators nearby and-

He jerked his brain roughly back on track, tugging on a curl and forcing himself to focus back on Fundy. “Sorry about that. I don’t remember doing it.”

Fundy glanced away, rubbing the back of his neck. “Mom thought maybe someone who might read as mer could do it.” He said. And Tubbo bit his lip so hard that he tasted blood.

“Really, big man?” He said, staring back down at his hands. “I dunno, you’re pretty not fishy to me. Tommy calls you a furry.”

Honestly, he didn’t think the fish side of him really knew how to treat Fundy. There was this dawning sort of... awareness of him, but also confusion. He could be a threat, but also wasn’t a threat in a way that wasn’t helpful at all.

Tubbo didn’t have the urge to stay near him like he did the others. But apparently, he didn’t have the urge to maul him. He wasn’t one of them, but neither did he read as someone to be afraid of. Or we’ll, like the adult mers.

“I’m not a furry!” Fundy screeched. Tubbo went ramrod straight as Tommy groaned, rolling over to hide his head under the pillow on his lap. Fundy continued in a lower voice. “Sorry, I don’t want to wake anyone else up.”

“Why did you wake me up then?” Tubbo said, squinted at the light peeking in through the window. How many hours of sleep had he managed to snatch? Three? Four? They got back pretty late and a couple of hours went to watching kitten videos and then arguing about which kittens were cuter.

Three or four hours would have been nothing a few months ago. Back when Tubbo had his previous tea, and even better when he absolutely needed it, strong black coffee with honey mixed in. Now, the thought of drinking coffee made a wave of nausea rise in his throat and his stomach lurch. He missed it.

“You’ve been out for ten hours.” Fundy said, shaking his head. Tubbo’s mouth fell open. “Eight when mom came in to check on you.”

“Ten hours?” He said skeptically. He didn’t think he had slept that much since he was a baby. It definitely didn’t feel like he slept that much either. “You’ve got to be joking.”

But already his mind was starting to churn. Fundy looked tired, but far more awake and well rested than he felt. The light coming from the window was far brighter than the bleary light of morning. “It’s a side effect.” Tubbo said slowly before Fundy could speak again, tracing his thumb in circles over Tommy’s back. “The exhaustion.”

It had to be. They were warned that as the transformation continued, they would start growing more and more fatigued. Tubbo thought of the sound that the adult Mer had made, and the fish side of him quailed. He was going to be in huge trouble running away from them, it seemed to say. Massive trouble.

In the beginning, it hadn’t affected them this seriously. They had definitely slept more but right now, Tubbo felt he could go for at least a few more hours. So, in addition to becoming more vulnerable to being scolded like that (mer parenting techniques?), the exhaustion was worsening as well. Fantastic. Absolutely abysmal.

“Mom asked Kristin and she said it was probably overexertion from last night that made it worsen to this point. Both physically and magically. It just got smashed together with the mer pup weakness you’ve been going through. They had a long talk about it.” But from the look on Fundy’s face, he wanted to say more.

“I’ll wake them up.” Tubbo decided, yanking the blanket off of Tommy. Fundy jumped back with a yelp as Tommy came up screeching and making shrill chirping noises of displeasure, and Tubbo almost choked on the reassuring chirp that tried to crawl out of his throat.

“What the fuck, you bitch!” Tommy snapped, spinning around to face him. He made grabby hands for the blanket but Tubbo was quicker than him.

“We’re waking everyone up! Big news!” Tubbo chirped, sitting on top of the blanket before Tommy could steal it back. It was easier to feel cheery when someone else was sharing in the suffering of being woken up far too early. “Rise and shine.”

“Rise and go fuck yourself.” Tommy said, before kicking Ranboo off the bed. There was an odd lurch in Tubbo’s chest and he found himself biting back a worried trill at the soft groan of pain. “Fuck you boob boy.”

“What did I do?” Ranboo said sleepily, his sunglasses askew when his head popped up over the edge of the bed. He reached up, carefully fixing them before yawning again, his jaw cracking with how wide it was.

“Existed.” Tommy hissed. Oh, he was in a mood. Tubbo sighed, blocking Tommy before he could jump on top of Purpled, who was curled into his ball still.

“Purpled would actually stab you if you did that.” Tubbo said. Tommy bared his teeth.

“I’m not afraid of knives, knives are afraid of me! I’d liked to see Purple Guy cut me! I’ll cut him back!” Tommy snapped, lunging against Tubbo’s arms.

“Maybe let’s not.” Tubbo said, waving at Fundy. Fundy shook his head. Tommy hissed at him, and Tubbo winced at the odd wave of *displeased hatchmates* that hit him, almost making him loosen his arms before they tightened again.

He didn’t like the fact that Tommy got a direct line to his brain now. He used to joke about Tommy telepathy, but it wasn’t actually serious! Nobody needed Tommy in their head!

“Ranbooooo.” Fundy whined. He got an impressive groan from the side of the bed. “Wake up your scary friend so he doesn’t knife me. And before Tommy gets knife even though he deserves it for calling me a furry.”

“Nooooooo.” Ranboo said sadly. A suited arm flopped over the side of the bed, shoving Purpled. Once. Twice.

A hand shot out, catching it. “Someone better be dead.” Purpled hissed.

“You can’t say that anymore.” Tubbo sing-singed morbidly. Purpled hissed back at him, and Tubbo rolled his eyes, letting it roll off of him like water. “We slept for ten hours.”

“Fuck you.” Tommy said instinctively. “You’ve got to be kidding me.”

“Nope!” Fundy fumbled with his phone before holding it up. The time shone back, bold as brass. “It happened. Trust me, we were surprised enough to see that you were still asleep.”

“Fuck this.” Purpled said, shoving himself up to sit upright. His violet eyes blinked blearily in the light, but he sat up with a stubbornness that Tubbo was envious of, never swaying. There was a soft thump as the phone on his lap fell to the floor.

A soft knocking sound. “Fundy? Is everything okay.”

INTRUDER

Four hisses harmonized in the air as Tubbo forced himself up, eyes wide and calculating. Nowhere to move, so close to the mess, and a click mirrored his as Tommy snapped at the air. Purpled played front guard, a breeze stirring through the room as he hissed, his hands flexing.

There was an intruder here, an intruder far too close to their nest. Tubbo’s claws flexed as he hissed, telling them that he was much bigger and scarier.

Intruders couldn’t come in. The nest was too vulnerable, no chance of swimming away, and his hatchmates could be hurt. Or worse! Eaten! Not on his watch.

If an intruder came into the nest, Tubbo would destroy them. He ramped his hiss up higher when he realized that they still were behind the door, their shadow coming through under it, warning them if they tried to come through then they would regret it. A few chirps stirred in his throat, breaking up the hiss.

Why hadn't someone taken care of this? How did an intruder get this close to this hatchmates, why hadn't-

Tubbo choked.

"Tommy." He whispered. Sally. Why hadn't Sally intervened. Nobody else. That was Sally at the door. What were they doing? Why did that happen? "Tommy stop."

Tommy kept hissing and Ranboo was making this weird warning click sound now half hunched over on the floor, and the feral rage should look weird on them but it doesn't. Purpled barely stirred, glancing back at him and then away when they see that he's alright and none of them are listening and Tubbo feels terror and rage meet in his chest and crash together until he's choking back fear that tastes like iron and someone keens, high and afraid.

Oh. That's me making that noise, he thought. But he can't stop, the noise raising in his chest like the most awful crescendo, stealing away his voice until he breaks it to gasp for air and folding in on himself.

"Tubs. Big T. Look at me." He comes back to hands on his cheeks, blue eyes staring into his. The keening noise ends as Tommy looks strangely relieved. Someone was patting his knee. "What the fuck, I thought we scheduled our community mental breakdown in five weeks. You're starting without me."

"You weren't listening." Tubbo mumbled, before sniffing. Purpled glanced back again and then away, but not in the protective way of before. But in the distant horror and awkwardness of being faced with someone on the verge of tears.

Ranboo was still patting his knee, frowning. "I am so sorry about that." He said to Fundy. Fundy nodded slowly from where they had backed up against the wall, pressed firmly against it.

"All good." He squeaked. Tubbo scrubbed his face hard, feeling exhausted as the fear drained away. Was this how Ranboo had felt in the car?

Now he could guess how they had decided to scratch up Sally when she had tried to wake them up earlier. He met Tommy's angry eyes, the other shrugging and flopping back.

This was such a massive clusterfuck.

"I brought food?" Sally murmured through the door and Tubbo choked on the angry hiss of rage that rose in his throat, forcing the instinctive protectiveness down.

Wait. Food.

“Oh fuck yes, shove it through the door.” Tommy said, launching himself off of Tubbo. Tubbo would have complained more if he wasn’t following close behind, his stomach suddenly making itself very known.

As soon as the fish was shoved in, Tubbo’s worked narrowed down to it. They quickly portioned it out, Tubbo clicking and smacking away Tommy’s hands when he got too grabby. Fundy managed to herd them to sit on the floor rather than the bed before the hunger got too strong.

The first bite was bliss. Sheer bliss. Oddly dry to his tongue, but overwhelming that was the sheer feeling of hunger that surged over him like a tsunami at the taste. He ignored the forks, tearing into the fish with his claws, twisting and fighting to get to the very last beautifully tender morsel.

It was far too familiar to come up to messy hands and face, the fish skeletonized in front of him. Fundy looked traumatized as he stared at their plates, horror playing out in his eyes.

“When you threatened to eat me, I did not take that as seriously as I should have.” Fundy mumbled. Tubbo raised an eyebrow. “Fuck, you went through that like locusts. Is this why mom won’t let me eat chicken in public?”

Well, that was stupid. Even before the mer thing, Tubbo had been down to steal someone’s skeleton if ever provoked. This must be the weird debuff people got when they were raised in a loving home.

He wiped at his face, pretending he wasn’t checking the fish for more food and was disappointed when he found he had picked the bones clean. “What’s the other half of the news you brought?” He said. “It can’t be that bad.”

“What news?” Purpled said, looking up from his own fish. He set it aside, a knife slipping in his hand from somewhere. Tommy eyed it covetously which would be a concern for future Tubbo.

Or not. Tommy could probably be trusted with a knife. But then again, there was the Halloween Incident. Eh, still a concern for future Tubbo.

“Kristin thinks the only way to get to the island at the full moon is by getting the help of a mer she knows. She invited him over to convince him to help and we’ve got to convince him that we’re totally not doing this to turn you back.” Fundy blurted out.

A moment.

“FUCK.”

After the bomb that got dropped, the mood in the house was somber.

Even Tommy had stopped mumbling swears, pressing his face into Tubbo’s hair and Tubbo took a deep breath. He let his eyes wander, trying to think of something, anything.

Ranboo was crinkling the page of his memory journal in his hands over and over again, brows furrowed as he stared down. Purpled slid off the couch, glaring up at the ceiling. "Let's give up, we're fucked." He said blandly, the blade of his knife flashing in his hands as he tossed it back and forth, catching it by the hilt.

It wasn't a happy resignation. Purpled looked like he was contemplating murder, or at the least, mild arson.

Ranboo jerked. "We're Uh, We're Not fucked." He said. He glanced at Tubbo and Tommy. "Are we?"

"I'll fuck them up." Tommy mumbled into Tubbo's shoulder. "I'll fucking destroy them, that's what I'll do. And they're just going to cry and sob and I'll laugh at them."

Tubbo took another deep breath, trying to remember those breathing exercises he saw on YouTube once. "I'll admit, I don't really have a plan here, big man." He said and the words hurt as they ripped their way out.

He always had a plan. He was always the one with the plans, big and small. And sometimes they didn't work and sometimes they were just clumsy guesses that were frantically tied into something that could work. But he had always had a plan.

He had a plan when he and Tommy were bouncing from house to house, making sure they got fed and were safe and stayed together. He had a plan to mess with the bullies on Mako Island. He had plans to escape the mers before, from Schlatt, from Technoblade, from Dream, from Niki and Puffy.

But right now, for the first time in a long time. He had nothing. And he couldn't help but feel a bit like a failure.

"We need to get to the Moon Pool." Tubbo said, and he pushed down the ache with forced stubbornness. The tingle that told him to go there now, the tug in the back of his mind like the moon called the tides. "But I can't think of a single fucking way to get there without the mer fucking the whole thing up. But we can't just invite one of them in."

None of the mer they had met so far could be trusted. The closest had maybe been Punz who had grown so friendly with Purpled, but well, after the reveal he was going to take Purpled to the Moon Pool...

This was their home. A prison, yeah, now that they couldn't leave it without getting snatched up. But it was supposed to be safe here. There shouldn't be any other mer coming here.

But it made far too much sense.

"What about Dogchamp?" Ranboo asked, thankfully changing the subject.

"Not fast enough." Purpled spat out sullenly. He looked like he had pulled out a tooth just admitting it. "Before, they were just playing around. Dogchamp is a good boat and I will not

have anyone insulting her but there's no way that we wouldn't get capsized. Or the engine would overheat if I kicked it up any faster."

"Then we'd be stuck in the water." Tubbo said with a wince, feeling a ghostly pang of terror at the memory of Purpled half overboard, held in a mer's claws. That day could have gone so much worse if they had realized they were both pups then. There was no way they could have gotten away if it wasn't for their powers kicking in, with Tubbo making the water launch him into the boat. "And there's no way we'd outswim them."

Schlatt and Quackity had easily kept up with him in the water, and if what Tommy said was true, Techno had caught up to a mako and ripped it apart while Tommy could only barely dodge it.

Maybe... if he could manipulate the water to make them faster? But could he keep that up long enough to get to the island? And could the other mer counter that? Ranboo had said one of them could teleport before, and they still didn't know what some of them could do.

"I would!" Tommy insisted. "Put me in the water and I'll leave them in the dust."

"I, uh, think that's a me problem here." Ranboo said. He crinkled the paper again before smoothing it out. "Sorry guys, the fear of water is just, look I know I'm the problem here, uh, I just can't help it--"

He squeaked as a pillow smacked him in the face. Tubbo patted Tommy's arm, still raised. "Thank you for that Tommy."

"Never need an excuse to smack someone with a pillow."

"Yeah, I know you don't, big T." Tubbo said. Ranboo winced, shoving himself back up. "It's not about you and I don't like you blaming yourself here. It's just simple psychology."

"Psychology."

"Don't make fun of my dyslexia." Tubbo said without missing a beat. Fundy froze, mouth falling open and working soundlessly as he tried to beat that. "But it's not you, Boo. There's no way any of us could anyways. All of them were way bigger than us and way faster."

"Besides, that fear was helpful in the car." Purpled grumbled. Ranboo brightened a bit, his long face easing slightly as he smiled.

Tubbo grimaced at the memory. "And that doesn't even count the whole thing." Tubbo waved a hand at his ears and his three *hatchmates* friends grimaced at the same time. "If they make the mad noise again, we'll just freeze mid paddle."

It was eerie and terrifying, but at the same time felt so terrifyingly natural. Like it was almost normal now, that the mer could do that to him, some part of his brain treating it as a measure of safety. That they wouldn't use it against them.

But they weren't dumb mer pups, he reminded himself. They were human teenagers and no, he didn't not feel better at knowing this whole new language to get soothed and scolded in.

“Hurricane?” Tommy offered and Tubbo turned the idea over in his head before shaking his head. “Fuck.”

“We were wiped after that the last time.” Tubbo said. From what he knew at least, from Tommy and Ranboo and his fragmented memories. “It might have just been the hypnosis for me and Purpled, but I really doubt we’d stand a chance in the middle of the ocean. All of us passed out after that and that day after sucked.”

He felt like a zombie the entire day, thoughts like treacle and moving slowly. It would be so hard to fight past that again in the middle of the ocean.

“Sally and Fundy did have to practically drag us out of there.” Ranboo mumbled. “And that was boosted by the whole weird full moon thing and we weren’t super tired then. So, it would likely be even worse.”

Of course, with all the downsides, they couldn’t even cause massive hurricanes whenever they wanted. Not yet at least.

At the mention of the full moon, they all went silent. Tubbo stared down, tracing Tommy’s shirt and trying to pretend he wasn’t thinking about the odd float ones of that night, the perfect self assurance that he was safe and happy and the pull taking him home. To the island. That thing.

It would be a full moon the night they made this gamble. If any of the mers pulled that trick on then again...

“So, unless we discover how to fly or something, we’re stuck.” Purpled said. He ticked off his fingers, a little more intimidating because he was using the knife to do it. “There’s no planes on the island, we can’t flee to the mainland because it’ll be the exact same result as traversing to the island and there’s no way we can keep playing cat and mouse.”

“Now that is my fault.” Tubbo said. Tommy smacked him with a pillow before he saw it coming and Tubbo let out a soft oof as he fell over, head ringing slightly. “What was that for, big T?”

“For a while as they say.” Tommy said, flipping on top of Tubbo. “Fuck you bitch.”

“But it is.” Tubbo insisted. “If I hadn’t tried to make that deal with Schlatt...”

He screeched as Tommy dragged the pillow back up and started beating him with it, holding his hands out to defend himself.

“It wouldn’t matter anyways.” Ranboo said softly, ignoring Tubbo getting beaten black and blue. “Like you said for me. There’s no way they aren’t going to catch us anyways, at least eventually. Each escape gets narrower and narrower and each route gets cut off.”

Tubbo flopped back as Tommy finally stopped hitting him, staring up at the ceiling. Part of him knew Ranboo was right, past the guilt. Last time, if it hadn’t been for the deal, the chaos of multiple groups, and a few helpful interventions, they would’ve been caught.

He had discarded so many plans. But Tubbo refused to just throw in the towel like this.

“I think that means we have no other choice than to rush the island or take Kristin’s plan.” He said. “Which is a really fucking stupid idea. But I can’t think of anything else. We need to get to the Moon Pool.”

If they missed their chance at the full moon, it was all over. Completely done. By the time the next chance to turn human again rolled around, they would be well and truly caught, ensconced in the nests the mer wanted them in.

Part of his mind let out a longing chirp at the thought of a nice safe nest and protectors and Tubbo strangled it ruthlessly.

“We’ll have to go with Kristin’s plan.” He said reluctantly. He hated the idea of handing over the control of the plan to someone else but he couldn’t think of a better one.

“Kristin’s nice.” Tommy said, propping his head up on his chin. “And she’s a woman too, which means she should be respected.”

“Tommy I once watched you chase down and kill someone in Minecraft because they were wearing an anime girl skin.”

“I don’t see your fucking point.”

“Right.” Fundy said, nodding his head awkwardly. “Right, well, I guess we can tell them the plan isn’t off. And Kristin will let you know what you need to do when she gets here.”

“What do we need to do, big man? You said something about convincing them?” Tubbo asked, narrowing his eyes. Was this a mer that they had met before? He hoped not. He didn’t want any of them around.

“Sort of?” Fundy scratched the back of his head. “She said that they can solve the problem of getting us to the island before another pod intervenes and you know, kidnaps you guys. But well, no mer is going to agree to it if they knew it was to turn you guys back.”

“So, we’ve got to pretend that it’s for another reason?” Ranboo said, marking something down in the journal page he had been ruthlessly crumpling and uncrumpling. “I dunno, man, what if it’s another trap from the mers? What’s to stop them from turning against us?”

That’s what Tubbo was wondering. He did not like the idea of putting their safety into the hands of a mer, especially after what happened before. At least two of the times they had almost been caught because a mer pretended to be helpful and give them a lift. He was getting really tired of that old trick.

“Kristin says she has a pretty convincing story to sell him on a reason to help us.” Fundy said, half shrugging. “I don’t know what that story is, but she and mom seem to think that it might work.”

“Won’t they know about the full moon though?” Purpled asked, the knife fast enough to be a blur in the air. “That this time, it’ll turn us back?”

“You know, you guys have a lot of questions.” Fundy sighed. They all stared at him. Their lives, or at least, human lives were on the lines here. “Probably not? Kristin only knows because she did a lot of research of the full moon and the Moon Pool. Most mer probably wouldn’t care about it, and it’s not like they pay close attention to cycles like that with how old they are. The time in between those is like a month to them. Schlatt doesn’t even know what year it is, I bully him on Twitter about it.”

“He’s probably going to kill you for that.” Tommy said admiringly, and Fundy shrugged. Tubbo’s approval of him ticked up several notches. “Let’s fucking get this acting, I guess!”

“We should probably kick Tommy out.” Purpled said ruthlessly. “He’s an awful actor.”

Tubbo snorted a laugh as Tommy let out an offended hiss. “How dare you! I’m the best fucking actor ever! I’ve got like a million fucking Grammy’s for acting! Directors beg me to come act for them and I just say memmeme, I don’t wanna, I’ve got to focus on my hot girlfriends.”

“Sure.” Tubbo said, flopping back and leaning hard on the bed. His nerves jittered when Fundy opened the door, and he bit back a panicked click at the sudden feel of exposure. Only releasing the breath when it finally clicked shut.

The soft click of Purpled flicking his knife from hand to hand. The crunch of paper as Ranboo folded it again and smoothed it out. Tubbo closed his eyes. His mind felt like it was going a mile a minute and he kept fidgeting, unable to lie still. It’s too much.

There was too much new information introduced today. So much to categorize and plan around, and so much that he didn’t have. But his mind kept ticking on a completely separate list like an angry clock.

“What’s going on in your busy head there?” Tommy said, leaning against him. Of course he had notice. Tommy was frighteningly oblivious sometimes but other times, he noticed far too much. His voice was strangely hushed and for a moment, Tubbo was reminded of how they’d whisper to each other at night at their foster homes, keeping their voice low so they wouldn’t wake anyone up. “You can tell me Tubs.”

Tubbo let out a shuddering breath. “I don’t really have it anymore, is what I’m thinking about.” He said. He pointed at his head. “The fish brain. But I shouldn’t say that because it’s not gone, it’s just... expanded. I noticed it after what happened earlier.”

Tommy stayed silent, staring at him. Tubbo lowered his hand. He had been noticing it as the day drew on, but to be honest, it was before that even. He just hadn’t wanted to think about it. But earlier had thrown it into sharp relief, forcing it to the point that he couldn’t ignore it anymore.

“Fuck.” Tommy whispered. He bonked his head against Tubbo’s. A slow realization was dawning in his eyes. “Fuck me. Yeah. Fuck.”

“It feels like the line between my brain and fish brain is so much more blurred now. Like, before it was so clear where those thoughts and impulses came from and it felt so foreign like

why would I want to and why it kept feeling that way. But now, it just feels like another part of me.” Tubbo said. It had originally been a joke, calling it the fish brain.

But that’s what it had felt like. Like along with the transformation, a second brain had shoved itself in, a brain that preferred chirps and trills to English, that called his friends hatchmates, those instincts to curl up in a tight space, that freaked out so far from the water, that made his dry skin feel foreign to him.

It kept getting louder and louder. Harder to bite back the sounds, the jitteriness when people came too close to them, the reactions when the adult Mer had chirped and trilled and scolded them.

And now the lines felt... blurred somehow. Not louder, but no longer different. He couldn’t miss how all of them were chirping and hissing more often. How Sally didn’t even come in and there was just this terrifying feeling of *Intruder! Danger to the nest* and Tubbo’s hackles had raised like they used to when he met the bad foster parents.

Even more frightening was how he could see it in the others. Ranboo’s eyes had dilated last night when he saw the kitten videos that looked just like when the mer had seen them, Purpled hissing as his claws flexed, and Tommy’s chirps at waking up.

He didn’t think he would attack Sally again like they did this morning or like the knee jerk reaction that they had at her voice at the door. There was a clarity that came from being fully awake and fed again, a clarity that let him push back on the protective rage that rose up. But what terrified him more than the fact that they would attack if half asleep was the fact that...

He didn’t feel safe with Sally anymore.

He hadn’t felt safe here since the mer had attacked at the full moon but he had chalked that up to the reveal of Fundy’s other parent and the sudden shattered illusion of safety.

But when he staggered through the door last night... there was no relief like there was that night, waking up and hearing about how she had come in clutch with the car. Like his mind had already added her to the list of adults who could betray him and she couldn’t be trusted.

It scared him down to his bones that he felt this way. He knew logically Sally wouldn’t protect them but she wasn’t a protector or a caretaker. Last night had forced his eyes open wide to how much they had changed, and he couldn’t help but slowly tick down the list.

“It’s fucked up, it is.” Tommy whispered, and Tubbo felt a warm hand wrap around his. Spins was crushed between them as Tommy leaned closer, the warm weight of him keeping Tubbo anchored. “We never should have taken that fucking bet.”

“You can say that again.” Tubbo said, closing his eyes as he heard the front doorbell ring.

Fish brain is now regular brain. The quartet would like a refund, please and thank you. Also, new mer joining the group?? Who's it going to be? I mean, I know, but I hope you enjoyed this chapter! Feel free to kudos, review, bookmark, I enjoyed writing it.

Also! Keep an eye out, because I'll be posting up the AU and other writing pieces for this world collection area soon.

And as part of Mermay and an apology for being gone for so long, let's start off with a QnA! Just put any question you have in the comments, and I'll try to answer it as long as it's not going to spoil any future plans I have.

In Over Our Heads

Chapter Notes

This chapter is dedicated to ToxicAgarian! They made the most AMAZING comic series on this fanfic and their art style is INCREDIBLE! Go check it out here:

<https://www.tumblr.com/wwrr-comic/761117436260024320/when-the-water-ran-red-comic-master-post?source=share>

Also, small trigger for gaslighting in this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

They piled onto the couch in the end.

It felt right. None of them wanted to split up right now.

Ranboo folded himself into the corner as much as he could, trying to ignore Purpled and Tommy passive aggressively shoving each other over Tommy encroaching too much into Purpled's space. Tubbo somehow plopped himself right into the middle, miraculously avoiding any of the shoving.

It was easier, to ignore the skin crawling itch of anxiety. At least for him, probably?

He was always anxious. It was just a feature, not a bug now.

But it didn't mean he enjoyed how it ratcheted up to eleven when Sally guided Kristin into the room. The fight between Purpled and Tommy finished immediately, everyone huddling back into the couch. Ranboo just tried to fold more into the couch.

Someone hissed. Maybe it was just him.

No, that was a chorus of hisses. Well, at least he didn't have to feel embarrassed? Cringe in numbers and all that.

Why, oh why, had he not gotten a better power like invisibility? Invisibility would be perfect right now.

Kristin stopped in the doorway, looking them over. "Ah, I can see this stage has started." She said, pursing her lips.

Sally's shoulders sagged. "This is normal?" Ranboo couldn't help perking up a little, curious about the answer.

“Possibly? I’ve studied myths and some evidence and it’s not like they’re not an odd case already?” Kristin tilted her head to the side. “But I wouldn’t doubt there is a biological advantage to heavily distrusting people outside of their caretaking structure.”

Rats. He had been kind of holding out that maybe his anxiety disorder actually was infectious.

“Great. That is great.” Sally pinched the bridge of her nose. “It’s not the end of the world, but we’ll need to figure this out after we talk with your contact.”

Kristin winced. Ranboo froze.

“It may be for the best if you’re not around for this talk.” Kristin said delicately. Sally eyed her coldly. Out of the corner of his eye, Ranboo saw that Tubbo steeped his fingers, eyeing them both.

“And why is that?”

“Mer can be... rude. Very rude, to land dwelling people. And while Fundy may get an exemption due to his hybrid heritage and I’ve put in a lot of work for my reputation, he may be very unfriendly seeing you at first encounter.” Kristin said. “At least right now.”

“Maybe we could go get those groceries that we didn’t bring back.” Fundy volunteered. They were pressed as close into the wall as possible, eyes darting side to side.

Whoops. Maybe they should have grabbed those? But to be fair, they had much bigger problems to worry about by then.

Sally glanced back at them, biting her lip. “Are you sure that you’re okay with this?” She said, “It could be dangerous. I trust Kristin but dealing with a mer can be deadly.”

Tommy scoffed. “I could fuck ‘em up, easy.” He said. Ranboo shook his head immediately. Tommy nodded. Ranboo shook his head. Purpled face palmed.

“If they’re going to deal with us now, they’d do it anyways whether you’re here or not.” He said. “And if this pushes them to do it, better to find out now than out on the water.”

Ranboo shuddered.

Sally nodded slowly, taking Fundy by the arm before they headed back towards the door. Fundy leaned into her as they walked.

Ranboo lurched a little, biting back something sharp and concerned seeing Fundy walk out the door.

Don’t be weird, he reminded himself as he forced himself to sit back. Fundy’s with his mom. There’s no safer place for him.

But Fundy leaving made him feel jittery. Incredibly so. Maybe it was the nerves finally hitting at the realization that they were inviting in a Mer.

“Right. We have a minute.” Kristin fixed her hat, even though the veil was still perfectly adjusted. Mood. Ranboo was always messing with his cuffs. “Here’s the deal. He has no idea what we’re planning to do with the Moon Pool.”

“Then what did you tell him?” Tubbo asked, raising an eyebrow. Ranboo didn’t like how Kristin sighed.

“I told him that there were worries that with your age, you would need to return to the Moon Pool to settle. And that your current sense of rebellion can be fixed by this. But that right now, no pod can be convinced to let you travel without interfering and the process is stressing you out.” Kristin said. “He’s under the idea that this will settle you enough to be adopted and stop... fussing.”

He was right. He didn’t like the sigh.

“That’s bullshit.” Tommy said, his face twisting. Tubbo reached out, holding his hand without even a wince.

“Can it actually do that?” Ranboo asked, sinking down a little in his seat. At the thought of going back to the Pool, he felt almost happy and fluttery. The pool was safe. It was hidden, it was comfortable, it was perfect. A little tug that started up in his heart when he thought of it.

Which was... honestly weird. It was like biting into ice cream and expecting vanilla because it’s white but it turns out to be mint.

He was terrified of water. Even shallow water like the pool took heavy encouragement from Tubbo, and what did that say about him that that was the moment he decided he would be friends with them for life?

You would think that becoming a literal mermaid would fix that. Haha. Nope.

So, the thought about being happy about being in a pool was... ugh. Also, did not bode well for his questions.

“Theoretically, maybe?” Kristin said, tipping her hand back and forth. “But, unlikely. The Moon Pool was blessed to cause the change but there’s no large possibility that it could do something like that. In all honestly, any difference would likely be due to being put into an environment that’ll heavily trigger your instincts as well as it being your, well, hatching place.”

“Like the car.” Purpled spat. The strange happy feeling in his chest crumpled to an odd mix of happiness and dread. That had been awful.

“Hatching place?” Tubbo echoed, eyes focused. Kristin signed.

“You know we only have so long before he gets suspicious on why we’re keeping him waiting.” She chided. “From what I know of mer culture, a hatching place can be a serious deal. Most pups never leave it until fully grown, and it often carries an imprint that makes

them feel safe. No matter how old the mer, they can lead you back to where they hatch. Even once grown, they always return back when they're planning for their own pups."

...so basically a big deal and very bad any other night than the one they were aiming for.

Tubbo shot them all wary glances, so strong that he could feel the secondhand worry. Or maybe that was his own anxiety.

"Look, I get this isn't optimal. But he's the only one who would accept this kind of arrangement and has the power to do this." Kristin said slowly. "The Watcher or X could, or perhaps Smajor or Clownpierce. But all of those belong to pods who would likely just take you."

Which. Ranboo did not want! At all! But it did suck the reminder that they didn't really have a choice in this whole thing.

"Right. Best acting." Tubbo said, sinking back a little in his seat.

"Right." Kristin said, patting off her dress. "Look at me lecturing you! Just, pretend like you're reluctantly going along with this to make it easier on yourselves."

Oh, Ranboo was so good at that. He was usually reluctant to do anything. It wasn't a huge jump to doing something like this.

But that didn't stop the way the group crowded closer together when Kristin went to the door.

"I'm just saying." Tommy broke in. "Murder is still on the table."

A short laugh.

It didn't last long.

The door clicked open.

A feeling of pure wariness erupted in Ranboo's chest. He winced, unable to bite back the hiss that slipped out before he could catch it. With an odd crumpling noise, his fingers ripped into the couch arm.

It felt... not as awful as when they saw Sally. But still like he was holding them at arm's length, one step out the door to disappear.

Which was odd because he was just kind of... normal.

Honestly, the variation was kind of insane? Like, the shadow guy who picked him up or Foolish all looked more inhuman but then you had guys like this one.

Messy light brown hair. Purple hoodie with a green swirl in it. Ranboo couldn't make out his eyes, but honestly, he looked just like every other tourist that he saw walking down the street.

“I come in peace!” He said, showing his hands. It didn’t lower Tommy and Purpled’s hackles any bit. “Wow, tough crowd.”

“It’s been a long week.” Tubbo said, practically sitting on top of Tommy. Even though Ranboo was almost certain that Tommy wouldn’t actually lunge.

The longer that the guy stood there, the more he felt frozen to his seat.

“Yeah, I heard!” He said. “So, I’m Karl! If you heard anything about me, it’s probably a lie. Unless it made me look good, in which case, that’s good.”

“Cool. Don’t think we’ve heard anything.” Ranboo said, starting to fidget with his tie. It only took a few seconds before Tommy was reaching for it too, fidgeting back and forth.

Apparently, it was enough to get Karl’s attention.

“Awww.” Karl cooed as he leaned closer, wriggling his fingers at Tommy. Ranboo sinks down because he knows what comes next, even as Tubbo pulls Tommy back.

Too slowly because Tubbo is a chaos goblin just like Tommy, he just buried it deeper.

snap

But instead of Karl lashing out or going cold or making a comment about how an animal can’t be expected to be treated like a- he throws his head back and laughs.

“You really are just as adorable as they say you are!” He chirps, pulling his hand back and sticking it into his hoodie pockets. “Almost makes me want to settle down, pick a spot, and adopt you myself?”

“Doesn’t every mer want to do that?” Tubbo said, eyes narrowing. Ranboo can already hear the sounds of gears clicking and bees buzzing.

“Well, sort of?” Karl waved a hand back and forth. “I guess, in your human terms, you can think of me as one of those cool, fun podmates! But I’m not really the Caregiver type and I’m too free range to want to settle down. You can’t travel with pups.”

“Until?” Ranboo said, a bit hopefully. Was there a line when most mers gave up?

“Probably a couple centuries?” Karl said, taking it the wrong way. “I think it kind of varies but I wouldn’t know. I’ll probably pop in, but that’s fine!”

“It’s a bit unusual for mer who tend to raise communally but some members on the outskirts of pods tend to wash in and out with the tides.” Kristin said gently.

“That’s me!” Karl said. “I’m on good terms with everybody! Except Philza but if you think about it, did he really need three corals shaped like a bird?”

“Apparently, yes.” Kristin said, her eyes dancing.

Man, Ranboo wished the other mer were as chill as Karl.

But no, he reminded himself as Tubbo pressed back into his side. After all, Karl had agreed to helping with this thinking it would let them sink deeper into the ocean, instead of leaving it forever.

Even if he didn't want to kidnap them for himself, he still didn't care what they wanted.

It felt easier to sink into his own mind, buzzing anxieties making him sink away from the conversation, the careful back and forth, Karl's almost unsettling glee. Just let the time slip away, moments dwindling at he tugged at the loose threads left from his fingers ripping into the couch.

Sometimes, Ranboo wished for the ease of just. Bullies. Life was so much easier when he just had to deal with Clay, and he thought he'd never say that. At least Clay only messed with him at school, and half the time, didn't even notice Ranboo wasn't listening to him and sometimes just pretending like he did because honestly it was so awkward to reveal you weren't actually listening to anything-

"Ranboo?"

"Yes, I agree." Ranboo said immediately, snapping back to awareness. He very carefully didn't look at Purpled's raised eyebrow.

"They were asking you what you wanted to do next." Tubbo prompted. "We've got some time to kill before we have to get prepared."

"Ah. Yeah. I knew that, man." He did not but admitting that would be so cringe. "I could probably go for another nap."

Remember the days when he stayed up all night watching cute cat videos and doodling? He did. He definitely did. He missed it.

"Noooo, I'm so fucking tired of sleeping all the time like a bitch!" Tommy said, flipping back into the cushion.

"Isn't that kind of-" Fundy started.

"Shut it, furry." Tommy threatened, pointing a finger at him. "I have knives and the big man does not need to sleep. He only needs women and knives."

"Great, I'll kill you next time I see you sleeping." Purpled said, without missing a beat. Tommy sniffed at him.

"Well, that would never happen because I don't sleep."

A soft click broke the silence. Ranboo felt himself lurch back, the loose pile suddenly compacting as they gathered back together.

“We’re back.” Sally said, pushing the door open. But the tight feeling in Ranboo’s chest didn’t go away.

And then Karl hissed. And Ranboo was blinded by pure terror.

When the world swam back into focus, Karl and Sally were sitting on opposite sides of the room, glaring at each other. Purpled was practically laying on top of him. What wasn’t singed on the couch was icy.

Fundy shifted from foot to foot, still hovering by the door. A knot untied in Ranboo’s chest when he saw them, feeling a little bubbly at the thought of him being safe.

...man, he was not used to fish brain.

“Now that we are on a better foot, does anyone have any requests before this meeting is adjourned.” Kristin said delicately, deliberately not looking at them.”

Well. If it was on the table. There was one thing he wanted to do.

“What if we do one last visit to town?” Ranboo forced himself to meet Tubbo’s eyes. He didn’t like what he saw there. Tubbo was almost manically cheery eyed, but strain showed in the corners. He almost reached out to pat him. Instead, he fumbled, placing his hand over Tubbo. Five inches above his head with Tubbo staring up quizzically.

Nice. Great compromise brain. But at least it got that look to break into some sort of confusion.

“I don’t know if that’s a good idea.” Kristin said, something pitying to her gaze. “With everything going on, and with how hostile you guys were, I don’t think it’ll work.”

“I think it might be a good idea.” Sally said resolutely, waving off Kristin’s and even Karl’s faint look of worry. “We’ll be with them! And depending how it goes this full moon night, they may not even be able to visit any time soon. One last visit may be good to settle them.”

Ranboo winced. He knew it was true but man was it so weird to meet someone who matched his negativity. He thought Purpled was the only one.

But on the other hand... he really did want to go.

“She’s not... wrong?” He broke in softly. “It might be nice, looking at everything again. They’re supposed to leave us alone, right?”

He grew up here. And his parents weren’t fond of his roaming but out of sight, out of mind, and roaming was always so much easier than staying in his cold and empty bedroom.

If they lost this chance, it could be centuries before they came back. As awful as it was to think of losing.

“Absolutely not.” Kristin said, shaking her head. “There is no way I can allow them to leave this place before we go to the island. It’s too dangerous.”

Ranboo sunk back a bit. But Tubbo caught his eye. Tubbo's eyes stared into his own and for a long moment, Ranboo thought about it. And then he nodded.

"But they are supposed to leave us alone." Tubbo pointed out. "And setting that aside, perhaps it could be safer for us to go. They wouldn't expect us to leave this place, after all."

"They already know we live here." Purpled said, firmly avoiding their gazes. "And they won't attract attention by attacking us with so many people around."

"It's not attacking!" Karl protested but Ranboo was too invested to care.

Man, was this what love and concern was like? He knew Tubbo thought this was a bad idea but here he was, speaking up for him anyways. It made him feel oddly warm and fuzzy, like he had caught something.

The cheer died in a moment.

"What about you attacking them?" Kristin said flatly. Somehow, she managed to keep everyone's gaze, like a whirlpool had settled into the middle of the room. "You trusted Sally and attacked her just this morning. You are dangerous to any humans that come near you."

"But--"

"What would you do if someone bumped Tommy right now?" Kristin continued, her voice steadily calm. Ranboo started to shake. "Or snapped at Ranboo for being in the way?"

His teeth ached.

Ranboo swallowed hard. For one long moment, everyone was quiet.

"Kristin." Sally interjected. "They just want to see their home one more time."

"I don't say this to be cruel." Kristin said, shaking her head. "But even if I could persuade Karl to let you go, the risk of one of you turning hostile and injuring someone is too high. And if you get discovered by people..."

Ranboo's stomach lurched. He bit back on a sudden rise of nausea. Tubbo had told them about his ideas of government agencies. And dissections.

Ranboo wasn't much of the plucky hero type. He was more of the person who dies first to show how bad a situation is type.

"Please don't cry. I'm awful when people cry." Karl said. And then he clicks. And clicks again.

Ranboo lets it wash over him for a moment. Shamefully. But the clicks felt somehow nice. Nice when his world was tilting.

He couldn't go back now. Kristin was right. They could hurt people. They nearly hurt Sally, and she had been nothing but nice. Why did he even think this was a good idea?

Kristin stood again, ignoring a pensive Sally. "I think you all should go lie down." She said. "Karl wanted to talk to Sally anyway."

"I'll go sort the groceries." Fundy said, beelining for the kitchen.

And Tommy chirps. Ranboo is quicker, clamping his hands over his mouth.

"FUCK." Tommy yells, slamming his hands down on the couch arm. Fundy stumbled, nearly walking into the doorframe.

"Ah." Kristin coughed into her hand. "I wasn't expecting this."

"Expecting what?" Sally said, a touch wary.

Maybe his anxiety really was contagious, Ranboo thought. Because right now, it certainly felt like he had caught it more than once.

It was getting really tiring getting smacked in the face by major changes.

"Awww, you're the hybrid mer kid, right?" Karl said. Fundy went Absolutely Still, not even a twitch. The only motion was the quick rise and fall of his chest. "That's cute, they see you as a hatch mate? Sort of? I can see why, now that I know what you are, I get a confusing reading of you. Half food and half pup."

Tommy slammed his head against the couch arm, his nails digging in. But Ranboo couldn't help the considering glance towards Fundy.

Fundy didn't feel strange but... yeah? Ranboo could see it? It's like Fundy wasn't quite in the same category as the others but neither was he not?

Like, he didn't feel the all encompassing need for Fundy to be close like the others but neither did he want him to leave. It was honestly, really weird, especially considering how rocky their short of friendship had been up until a short while ago.

Sally sat down hard, her back sliding against the wall. "You have to be kidding me." She said, and Ranboo flinched back as her eyes swept over them. Karl hissed, sharp and rattling and somehow he knew it wasn't aimed at them but it still made him flinch back. "Don't. Don't tell me my son is getting dragged even deeper into this."

"I think it's time you all went for a rest." Kristin said, waving at their little group. "Fundy, go finish in the kitchen."

Fundy hesitated, only a moment as he looked at them. Ranboo shrugged when his gaze landed on him. It's not like he knew what to do. Fundy stared for a moment before nodding, turning and fleeing into the kitchen.

The tug came instant and sharp and Ranboo forced himself to breath through it with those meditation techniques he learned when going down the rabbit hole and having a panic attack at three am a year ago.

It didn't actually help much, but it made him feel better

Tommy mumbled curses under his breath, flipping on top of Tubbo. Ranboo forced himself to wriggle out, immediately heading to the bedroom they claimed for their own.

He settles on the door ground hard, glad for the safety of his sunglasses and mask. He loved his friends, but he didn't want anyone looking at his face right now.

He just wanted to exist.

It's only when the door clicks shut that he has a sudden awareness that those he thought would follow him, weren't the one who did.

"You know that it doesn't have to be this way if you don't want it to be." There was a soft whisper of shifting fabric as Kristin kneeled in front of him. This close, and her hat cast a shadow across his face.

"Uh?" Ranboo said, very intelligently.

Kristin smiled as she reached for his hands. Her hands were oddly cold in his, and Ranboo shifted a bit uncomfortable at the reminder of how different he was now.

Or maybe she just had poor circulation? Focus on the positive potential Ranboo! Positive visualizations!

...oh, Tubbo had definitely followed through on his threat to swap his sleeping music playlist with positive meditation tapes.

"Ranboo?" And he jerked, realizing Kristin was still staring at him. But she didn't react, one side of her lips quirked as she stared at him.

"Can you repeat that again? I wasn't listening." He said.

"That's okay, sweetheart." Kristin said. "I just wanted to see if you had reconsidered whether you'd prefer to remain a mer and return to one of the pods."

Ranboo flinched, eyes darting around the room. The others hadn't returned yet but it didn't stop him from feeling nervous. "I--"

"I wanted to ask one more time before we started this plan." Kristin said, her dark eyes staring into his, as if the veil she wore didn't exist. "If you were sure you wanted to go through with it.

"If you're worried about being hurt by them, you shouldn't be." Kristin went on. "All the research I found suggests that pups are treated with the utmost care. They might be a bit stern, but you wouldn't be hurt or threatened if you preferred to go with them."

Ranboo shifted awkwardly, unable to meet her eyes. "I'd still prefer not to?" He squeaked. "I talked it over with the others and we agreed."

“I just wanted to talk to each of you separately, to get an idea what you may want.” Kristin said, leaning back. Ranboo relaxed just a bit.

“That’s nice of you.” He said. “But I think I’m okay with this. There’s definitely some, um, perks to being a mer? But I think we’d be happier if we were normal.”

Besides, he was pretty sure that while the mer thing had brought them together, they were bonded for life. The people who get turned into fish people together stay together.

Or something.

It’s not like Ranboo knew. He had never really had friends.

“If you think so.” Kristin said, releasing his hands. She stood, forcing Ranboo to look up at her. “After tonight, the option will no longer be on the table.”

“I know.” Ranboo said. He wrapped his arms around himself before reconsidering and sticking them in his pockets. That probably looked more normal, right?

“I apologize for having to put that all on you. I know I might have scared you.” Kristin said, her eyes solemn and focused. “I know others like Sally may be worried you will attack others but I only have your best interests in mind.

Ranboo opened his mouth, confused at how she called it. Like it wasn’t Kristin who said they may attack others.

“It’s easy to be looked at differently after all this. You’re going through a lot of changes and the environment has not been the best. The adults should be watching out for you.” Kristin said. And she says it so firmly, so calmly, that he can’t help but shut his mouth again.

Kristin nodded before turning away, heading for the door. It took Ranboo a moment before he slowly stumbled to his feet, following after her.

Maybe he’s overthinking it. He’s always overthinking. It’s practically his main character trait.

She opens the door, stepping aside to let the others spill in. Tubbo takes him by the shoulders and Ranboo lets him, glad to not have to be in charge of anything. He lets himself be spun, twisted, pushed back to the bed.

It’s almost nice how easily they settled together now. An arm gets thrown across his back, a leg crossing over his. There’s grumbling, of course, but everyone seems to settle into their spots with a strange click.

A throaty warble. Ranboo feels himself flush when he realizes that the sound came from him and that the others are staring now.

“It slipped out.” He said, before burying his face into the pillow.

“Awww, Boob boy likes us.” Tommy teased. Ranboo flushed even harder, the blanket going cold under his fingerprints.

“Don’t tease him.” Purpled interrupted. “Now is not the time Tommy.”

“Yeah, listen to Purpled.” Ranboo mumbled into the blanket. Purpled sighed. But it was good sigh? He thinks. It sounded pretty friendly at least.

“Aw, Purpled, are you defending him?” Oh no. Tubbo. Maybe he could just melt into this bed and stay here forever. Become one with the bed and join the world of comfiness beyond where he could be cringe in peace.

“Fuck off. Someone has to form an alliance against you two weirdos.” Purpled said. “I’m not stupid enough to think I can take you on in an argument on my own.”

“Awwww.” Ranboo mumbled into the bed. That was the closest thing he had ever heard to Purpled calling them friends.

“He’s as useful as a chocolate eclair with no pastry, but at least he’s an extra body.” Purpled finished ruthlessly.

“Awww, you do like him!” Tubbo teased, kicking his feet back and forth. “You must know each other well, having known each other since childhood.”

Bold of him to think Ranboo remembered much from of his childhood at all. His memory was awful.

“I’ve met a lot of people. Thought, I’ve never seen him before.” Purpled said, glaring at the door. Ranboo winced immediately.

Honestly, he wasn’t surprised Purpled was thinking about that. The thought had set off his anxiety as well. And he could almost feel it clicking into higher gear at Purpled’s words.

“How worried should we be about that?” Tubbo said tilting his head.

“Very?” Ranboo said, forcing his mind back on track. He fiddled with the hem of his cuffs before looking back up. “Purpled knew just about everyone. It’s a small island, even I know a lot of people. Unwillingly.”

“What Ranboo said. Both parts of my job meant I dealt with people or heard of them. It’s rare to find someone who hasn’t even shown up on my radar with how small this place is.” Purpled said. He folded his arms. “I even knew most of the mer we’ve seen, by reputation at least.”

Ranboo nodded. He had even been in Quackity’s gift shop.

It was a bit tacky and overpriced but everything was well made. Luckily, he hadn’t met them then. But, it was a mark.

“Right. So, not the end of the world but definitely a red flag.” Tubbo said, chewing on his lip. “I’m still not used to places where everyone knows of everyone.”

“It’s not that close but yeah.” Ranboo shrugged. “There’s just not many places to go when you grow up here. Every place is pretty well poked around in.”

He didn’t even come close to Purpled’s experience though.

“Fuck, I wish not being in hiding.” Purpled said, flopping back. “If everything was normal, I could have just talked to my contacts about who he was.”

“Texting exists, bitch boy.”

“I don’t do paper trails.” Purpled said without missing a beat. Deeply horrifying! Ranboo agreed with the idea though.

“Not like we have a choice in the end though?” Ranboo said, looking up. “It’s either trust them, or get guaranteed to be captured on our way there. We don’t have any plans to get there.”

And he didn’t intend to take Kristin up on her idea.

That brought the mood down by a lot. But Tubbo was nodding.

“He’s right.” He said. “We don’t really have any choice in the matter. There’s not a single viable plan.”

“Gods, I don’t even know what’s underwater to do.” Tommy grumbled, flipping back onto Purpled and starting the territorial argument anew.

“I’ll get two catfish and name them Enderchest and Enderpearl.” Ranboo said, without missing a beat. He shrugged at their stares. “What? Those are good names.”

“Those are from Minecraft.” Purpled said, a bit skeptically. Ranboo shrugged again. Maybe he’d take it more seriously if he didn’t hear about Purpled scamming people out of their money through Bedwars matches.

“Or maybe Moose. That’s a nice name.” He said. He always wanted a cat named Moose. It seemed like a cute name.

“Call ‘em Henry, that’s a good name.” Tommy declared. “Why would you ever need a different name?”

“Sure, *Tommy*.” Purpled said, without missing a beat. Tommy scowled. Ranboo stepped back just a bit too late as he lunged, yelping as Tommy crashed into his shoulder.

Purpled vaulted in the armrest with enviable grace. Ranboo would have pitched off of it and hit the ground head first. “Change your name to it, if you love it so much.” He taunted. Tommy screeched and lunged again, this time managing to tackle Purpled off the couch.

“This sucks, big man.” Tubbo said. Ranboo let out a soft oof as his head flopped against his poor defenseless arm. “Sorry we couldn’t go out to visit the island.”

“It’s okay. They’re probably right.” Ranboo said. Twist the cuff. Twist it back. Let his fingers run over the stitches. Twist again.

“Can’t imagine what this is like for you.” Tubbo said, tilting his head. “I only lived here for a short while and it still feels weird.”

“Mm.” Ranboo said. It felt very weird honestly. Ranboo had never thought of himself as someone dangerous.

A potato was more dangerous than him. Or like, a beetroot. The idea of being dangerous just felt bizarre.

But, he nearly had to correct himself when the door swung open unexpectedly.

Tommy cursed. And more shockingly, Purpled did as well.

It was Karl who stood in the doorway, surveying them with his arms folded across the front of his hoodie. “Kristin really wasn’t kidding when she said your instincts are all weird.” Karl said, his head tilting to the side.

“Can we help you with something?” Tubbo said, practically pressing Tommy down into the bed. Judging by Tommy’s flailing, it was for a good reason.

“Not much! I thought I’d come and take a look at you! The last batch of pups around here was way before I swam into town.” And worse, he stepped inside, closing the door.

Ranboo felt the blanket floo over him. He looked up to see Purpled pointed looking away, half buried under the blanket as well.

“We’re trying to sleep.” He said, sharp and pointed. Ranboo wrapped the blanket righted around himself, wishing it was weighted. He needed to be crushed right now.

He pretended he didn’t hear Karl’s cooing when Tubbo flopped on top of him and Ranboo let out a relieved sigh.

“Go fuck yourself, you absolute-“

“Enough Tommy.” Tubbo’s hand clamped over Tommy’s mouth. His steely eyes swept over the

nest

bed. “Karl is supposed to be helping us.”

Ranboo tried to bury himself deeper in the blankets.

He forgot they were supposed to be willingly going along with a plan to make them sink even deeper into their mer forms. His stomach lurched, just slightly. Ranboo was awful at lying.

“I’m hoping Quackity gets to keep you.” Karl said, propping his chin on his hands. “Quackity acting like a caretaker would be so cute! We’ve always wanted more pups.”

Oh this was going to be a long afternoon, Ranboo thought in despair as a pointy elbow jabbed in the back.

“We haven’t really considered it yet.” Purpled said without missing a beat. Ranboo peeked out at him.

He sucked at lying. But at least his friends were good at it.

Karl’s eyes lit up. “I can tell you all about them! Or maybe Dream’s pod, Sapnap is *amazing* when he gets all snappy and Guardian protective! I can’t decide!”

“Tell us everything.” Beneath Tubbo, Tommy had settled, glaring down at the blanket his face was mashed into. Another sign of their closeness. Ranboo was pretty sure that if he had done that, Tommy would have pushed him off the bed.

“Aw, anything to help some cute pups!” Karl said.

Yeah, Ranboo thought.

Anything but the help we actually want.

Honestly, it was.... Weird how normal the island was.

It feels like everything should be different now. Like the world should have had some cosmic, earth shattering change. At least maybe some rain.

It feels weird to look around and see people going on with their lives like there weren’t murderous mermaids who lived around and on the island. Just going around and checking out all the stores like people didn’t wash up on the beach horribly mauled.

Ranboo knew that was a stupid thought but he couldn’t help but think it, man! With how huge and catastrophic the.... Wow. It’s been way less time than he thought it was.

It felt like it had been years since that dumb bet.

“Ranboo? You okay? We can’t have you out of commission right now.” Purpled said. Ranboo shook himself.

“I was just thinking about how ever since that bet, we went from regular kids to... all this.” Ranboo said, waving a hand. Tubbo tilted his head and then grimaced.

“Oh, yeah, that is kind of trippy to think about, big man.” He said. “It’s weird to think that just a short while ago, my biggest problems were moving to a new place and dealing with a new foster parent.”

“Fucking hated all of it.” Tommy mumbled. “This has been my longest stretch without Coke since before I was born. No, not then. I swam in Coke in the womb.”

“That explains so much about you.” Purpled said, dodging a swat from Tommy.

“Made some friends!”

“No.” Purpled said. But no anxiety flared as Ranboo eyed him. The tone of it was just too light. Purpled shoved his hands into his pockets, looking away.

Or maybe it was the fact that the last month had proved that everyone was ride or die. Huh. That was a nice thought.

Ranboo had never really had friends before.

“I vote we avoid mer run shops as much as possible when we get back.” Tubbo said. Ranboo nodded eagerly. After this, he was never leaving the house again.

...what were they going to do when they were human again?

He considered trying to catch Tubbo’s eye, hard with his sunglasses, but dismissed it just as fast. Karl was still hovering nearby, unwilling to let them go far. It would be way too obvious a question. Tubbo and Purpled had both drilled it into their heads in the handful of minutes they had alone after Karl arrived.

Plausible deniability.

“Good luck. Wouldn’t surprise me if they indirectly owned half the island.” Purpled said, rolling his eyes. “I’ve been charting what I know since the restaurant incident and you are not going to like it.”

Aw, man. It gets worse?

But honestly, Ranboo can see it. Even before he knew about the mer, he knew most of this island was owned by various rich people. They could talk about small businesses all they want, but in reality? Everyone had some sort of backer. It wouldn’t surprise him if some of those rich people were the mer.

It did make him feel a bit queasy at the idea of his parents rubbing shoulders at fancy parties with someone like Schlatt or Philza. Would they even attend a party like those?

“You know, you wouldn’t perish instantly if you weren’t pessimistic for five seconds.” Tubbo said, rolling his eyes.

“I’d take that advice, but not from someone as paranoid as you.” Purpled said instantly. Tubbo shrugged. “Do you know how much harder it’s going to be to make money after this?”

“Fair enough.” Tubbo mumbled. “But, we do need to figure out where we are going.”

Two meanings. Ranboo picked the lighter one. But he wanted to. Talk about it, that is. What they were going to do when they were human again.

“Main Street.” Ranboo said. “Easy to wander in the crowd, not too crowded that we’ll get uncomfortable, not too far. It’s a straight shot to the docks.”

“Great. Just remember everyone. No biting.”

“I promise nothing.”

“Right.” Tubbo said. And Ranboo tries to let himself be swept up in it. Tries to ignore the persistent feeling of dread that dogs his footsteps. “Let’s get to the docks.”

Chapter End Notes

Kudos to those who guessed it was Karl! I just couldn’t resist the callback to Snow King by bringing him in.

Also... was Kristin lying? Kind of, yeah! Right now, while they can attack, if they were in a wide open area, they’d pick flee or hide any time. Pups aren’t dangerous at all unless they feel cornered which is what happened with Sally. Poor Ranboo got lied to.

End Notes

I'm going to be using episode titles from H2O: Just Add Water for chapter titles! I'm very excited for this story, it's been brewing on the back burner and Mermaid felt like the perfect time to create it.

Any kudos or reviews are appreciated! I love hearing your thoughts!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!